

THE
BALM of GILEAD,
FOR
Healing a Diseased Land;

WITH
The Glory of the Ministration
of the SPIRIT:

AND
A SCRIPTURE PROPHECY of the Increase of CHRIST's
Kingdom, and the Destruction of Antichrist,

Opened and Applied in Twelve SERMONS upon
several Texts.

By JOHN WILLISON, M. A.
Late Minister of the Gospel at DUNDEE.

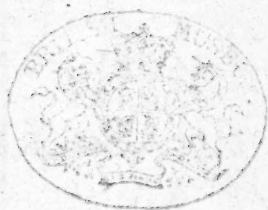
THE EIGHTH EDITION.

To which are added,
Five SERMONS preached upon Sacramental Occasions
by the same AUTHOR.

— *Let the whole Earth be filled with his Glory,
Amen and Amen, PSAL. lxxii. 19.*

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P R E F A C E.

ALTHOUGH these Sermons were preached in SCOTLAND, and have some reference to the case of that Church and land under her present divisions and backslidings; yet they are composed in such a strain, as to be useful and applicable to any church under the like distempers, which, alas, is the case of the most part.. What remedies can be so effectual to cure them of these evils, as these proposed in the following discourses, *to wit*, the excellent *Bahn of Gilead*, and *The Glorious Ministration of the Spirit*?— If it were the gracious will of God to dispose all the bishops and ministers of Britain and Ireland, to make it their business to open up and recommend these noble remedies to their people, it would contribute greatly to heal their maladies, and increase the kingdom of Christ in these lands. I can't help thinking but those who are consecrated to spiritual offices would be more suitably and profitably employed in this work, than in attending courts, and pursuing secular designs.

Seeing now the arm of the Lord is beginning to awake, and many are excited to run to and fro for increasing gospel-knowledge, and labour to propagate the doctrine of salvation thro' the imputed righteousness of the slain *Lamb of God*: And seeing the Lord is pleased in sundry parts of the world to give countenance to these endeavours by the out-pouring of his Spirit, for awakening many souls to an inquiry and search after true happiness thro' the blessed JESUS: It doth highly concern all gospel-ministers and preachers to concur in helping forward the Lord's work, by proclaiming the saving doctrine and offers of free grace

to the world, and to exert themselves for removing out of the way all letts and hindrances of the kingdom of Christ, that so his dominion may spread from sea to sea, thro' all nations of the earth.

In the following Sermons I have made some inquiry into the times and seasons of the increase of Christ's kingdom: and because this is greatly connected with the destruction of Antichrist, I have mentioned some conjectures and calculations about the time of his fall: though I think none should be too bold or peremptory in fixing the precise time, but all ought to wait patiently until God's set time shall come. All may now perceive Antichrist visibly risen and discovered. Nay, we have seen him arrived at his pomp and height about 1500 years after Christ: Since that time the Lord hath begun to waste and consume him, by the revival of religion and learning in the world. As his rise was gradual, so shall his consumption be. He hath now been labouring under a deadly consumption above these 200 years past. The wound given him is deep and mortal, so whatever pains be taken sometimes to heal it, all shall be in vain; for as Christ must increase, so Antichrist must decrease, and be quite ruined at length, as is shewed in the following discourses. May all the lovers of Christ pray fervently and look out for that blessed and joyful time.

DUNDEE, }

Jan. 20. 1742. }

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THE
BALM OF GILEAD,
FOR HEALING A
DISEASED LAND.

S E R M O N I.
U P O N

JEREM. viii. 20, 21, 22.

*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we
are not saved.*

*For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt,
I am black: Astonishment hath taken hold on me.*

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?

*Why then is not the health of the daughter of my
people recovered?*

IN the preceeding part of this chapter we have represented a great destruction that God was about to bring upon a sinful people, and the consternation the whole land should be in upon the alarm thereof. The sins of Judah were come to a great height, whereby God was provoked to let loose the Chaldeans against them. The prophet was himself an eye-witness of the oppression and desolation of his country and the church of God by the Chaldean army, and he foresaw still greater judgments and calamities coming upon them, whereby both he and the serious people of the

land were greatly affected, and put to lament their case before the Lord. Among other things they lament the disappointment of their expectations of healing and deliverance from distress, ver. 15. *We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble.* They sometimes had hopeful and promising seasons, when they expected relief; but after all their waiting they were disappointed; these likely times of healing were lost. Hence they are put to say, *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.* Summer and harvest are proper seasons of action, opportunities for armies to take the field, to subdue enemies, and bring about deliverance for an oppressed people: The winter that follows is not a fit season for action. It is sad when likely seasons for saving a people from temporal enemies and grievances are lost; but it is yet sadder for them to lose hopeful and promising seasons for saving of their souls. The loss of such harvest or summer days for our souls is the greatest ground of lamentation. The prophet being deeply sensible of his people's loss and calamitous condition, he is grievously distressed for them, ver. 21. *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt, I am black.* *The daughter of my people* is a common Hebraism used in scripture, and it signifies the body of the people of Judah, which was God's visible church upon earth; their hurt and distress did affect the holy man in the most tender manner, and drew forth his sympathy with them. Upon this account, saith he, *I am black*, I have lost my wonted colour, my face is turned blackish, or I go in black as mourners do. I am astonished and troubled the more that I see no appearance of relief for them in their distress, their case seems to be hopeless and incurable. Upon which he puts the question, ver. 22. *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why*

then, &c. Is there no balm for the distressed church, no physician for a diseased land? It is generally thought the question doth not import any despair or denial of help, but rather the contrary; as if he had said, Is there not balm? Is there not a physician? Yes, there is. The incurableness of their disease is not owing to the want of balm, or of a physician in the land, but to themselves and their unbelief. There was a sufficient remedy in God, and in the Messiah for all their grievances, had they accepted and applied the same. Hence he adds that pertinent question, *Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?* q. d. What is the cause then, or to whom is it to be imputed, that the church or people of Judah do still ly in a dying case? surely not to the balm nor to the physician, but to their own folly and obstinacy.

Quest. What is here meant by the balm of Gilead?

Ans. The land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, was a part of the country of Israel, where that plant grew which afforded a most precious balm for healing, when it was pierced, which was a rare and valuable commodity that other countries did traffick for with the land of Israel, Jer. xvi. 11. Ezek. xxvii. 17. And we see in Gen. xxxvii. 25, the Ishmaelites that bought Joseph carried balm from Gilead into Egypt. Naturalists say, this balm was the juice or oil that run from a certain low shrub, when its bark was cut, that grew especially about Jericho in the land of Gilead, and was of great value, as having a sovereign virtue to cleanse foul sores, heal deep wounds, help the eye-sight, cure the stings of serpents, yea it was a sort of catholicon that cured almost all diseases. This balm we may look upon as a fit type to represent Christ's blood, which is an excellent balm and catholicon for all diseases of the soul: For God's dispensations to the

Israelites were generally designed as types and signs of spiritual things under the New Testament times, according to 1 Cor. x. 11. *All these things happened unto them for ensamples; Orig. ΤΥΠΟΙ, for types.* And among the rest this balm of Gilead was typical and instructive to the virtue of the Messiah's blood; for seeing God vouchsafed this balm to Israel only, and made other nations beholden to them for it, it teacheth us that the balm for healing souls is only in the church of God, and Christ is the true antitype of this balm, for in Judah's land only was Christ known, there they had his blood daily typified to them in the sacrifices, and its virtue set forth.

Again, the physician in Gilead is next mentioned, because physicians use to abound where there is plenty of good medicines. The balm and physicians in Gilead are figuratively brought in here to point out the plenty of good means of health that were still in Israel for recovering them from their languishing consumption, if they had made a right use of them. As they had God himself, and the Messiah and his Spirit which he had promised to them, to look to for relief: so they had plenty of under means and physicians appointed them. They had God's law, the temple, the ordinances, the altar and sacrifices. They had also the princes, the priests, and prophets, whose business it was to redress grievances, reform the nation, and apply to heaven for help. So that if the health of the church and nation was not restored, it was not for want of balm, or a physician; nay, God had plentifully provided excellent means and remedies for their cure: And if their disease be deadly, or their wound incurable, it must be owing to themselves, and to their desperate wilfulness or incorrigibleness in sin, and to their refusing to submit to the physician's directions and method of cure.

The words being thus opened up, give ground for the following heads of doctrine.

I. The case of those is very lamentable, who lose their harvest and summer days of grace.

II. Every gracious spirit is a public spirit, and will lay to heart the calamitous case of the church or country whereof he is a member.

III. However desperate the diseases of those within the church may seem to be, yet if they die of them, it will be owing to themselves, seeing they have such an able Physician, and excellent balm to look to for healing.

It is the last of these doctrines I mainly intend to handle and insist upon; wherefore I shall the more briefly touch the two first as introductory to it.

I Doct. The case of those is very lamentable who lose their harvest and summer-days of grace; or their most hopeful and likely seasons of salvation.

I shall discourse this point in the following method.

I. Mention some of these likely seasons, which should be carefully improved.

II. Who may be said to have lost their summer days.

III. Enquire into the causes of men's losing these hopeful seasons.

IV. Shew the great evil and danger of losing them.

V. Make application.

I. As to the first, I shall instance some of the summer days or hopeful seasons which we should carefully improve for saving of our souls, and not suffer them to be lost. Such as,

1. The summer days of youth. O that is a hopeful season, when the heart is most tender and tractable, and easiest melted into tears for sin, and

kindled into a flame of love to Christ who died for our sins; God loves the first ripe fruits, young tears and prayers, young faith and love, and hence he makes the time of youth the usual season of converting and espousing sinners to himself. O young folks, suffer not these summer days to pass away in vain: but begin in this season to be religious, and to remember God and eternity, Eccl. xii. 1.

2. It is a promising season, when persons enjoy lively means and ordinances, whereby Christ crucified is evidently set forth before their eyes, as the only remedy for their perishing souls, and they earnestly called and pressed to come and close with him as such. *Behold, now is the accepted time! Behold, now is the day of salvation.* O let not this summer day of grace go over without closing with Christ in the offers of the gospel.

3. It is a likely season, when there is a noise and shaking among the dry bones, by the motions and strivings of the Spirit in and with the word, as when the Spirit brings the word close home to the soul's case, finding and singling it out, as Nathan did David saying, *Thou art the man*, thou art the child of wrath, the enemy of God, the unregenerate sinner, against whom the sword of justice and curses of the law are levelled. Or when the Spirit so fastens the arrows of conviction on the conscience, as to bring the man to a restless thoughtfulness about the guilt of his sins, and his eternal state, and to cry, *What shall I do, to be saved?* And to make him dissatisfied with all his earthly comforts, and say, *All these avail me nothing* while I go Christless. O this is a harvest-day of salvation, every minute of it is precious, and should be carefully improved for the soul.

4. The time of Satan's restraint is a season not to be lost: Sometimes the devil is so bound up that he cannot disturb the church by bloody persecutions,

or by errors and schisms as at other times, that is a fair summer-day of grace, which should be well improved. Tho' we can't say that Satan at this time is altogether bound up, nay he is wofully let loose in respect of error and division; but blest be God, he is restrained with respect to persecution, so that, my brethren, he cannot presently drive your teachers into corners, nor put you to seek your spiritual bread with the peril of your lives, because of the sword, in the wilderness, as sometimes hath been the case in our land. O then, do not sin away this calm summer-day, but with earnest attention and care hearken to the sweet voice of the *turtle*, which is still to be heard thro' all corners of the land.

5. The time when God is visiting a land with wakening and alarming dispensations of providence, is a season to be carefully improved for saving of the soul. When God doth premonish us that either a storm is coming on the church and land in general, or that death approaches us in particular, we should take warning, like Noah, while the evils are at a distance, *be moved with fear, and provide an ark for the saving of our souls*, before the flood of wrath come upon us. Nay, my friends, you have God to bless, that the *ark* is already prepared to your hand, and a window opened in the side of it for your entrance. May you be so wise as to take warning in time, get faith's wings, and flee into the ark Christ, before the flood arise, and before death come. You have had a long harvest-day of grace in the land, and now have shrewd tokens of night approaching: You may look for the night of death, or the winter of desolation strokes, persecution, and darkness. Wherefore, as Christ saith, *Work while it is day: yet a little while is the light with you, walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you. The night cometh* (saith he) *when no man can work.*

Surely it draws towards even-tide, and the night of death: Yea, a fearful night both of spiritual and temporal judgments seems to be drawing on; and should not the remaining light or day be well employed? There are several signs of an approaching night.

First, When the force and heat of the sun do abate, it draws towards night; so when the gospel sun, or preaching of the word, hath little heat or effect upon sinners cold hearts, it betokens night coming on. *Secondly*, When the shadows of the evening are stretched out and grow long, it is a sign of approaching night. And oh! how long are the shadows stretched out beyond the substance! How much doth the profession of religion exceed the power of it at this day? *Thirdly*, When the labourers go home from their work, it is a sign the night comes on. Ah! how many of our choice and faithful labourers do we see going home, without others to fill their room?—*Fourthly*, When the evening wolves and beasts of prey creep out of their holes, it is a token of night. And surely there have been evening wolves seen among us, who have intruded upon the vineyard, spoiled the vines, and miserably scattered the flock of Christ.—*Fifthly*, Growing darkness is a fore-runner of the night. Ah! how much doth darkness prevail among us at this time, yea so much, that several of the sharpest-sighted are reeling and mistaking their way, not being able to discern between sin and duty in diverse cases: Alas! many are wandring and losing their way. Surely then it is our wisdom and duty to improve the light that remains, in seeking converting grace to ourselves, and an assured interest in precious Christ, before the darkness of the night overtake us: And also to pray for pity to the land, that *at evening-time it may be light.*

In the *last* place, Notwithstanding of these dismal tokens, it makes the season somewhat promising, that we hear of Christ's goings as a conqueror in other parts of the world, and many bowing down at his feet. Now if the King of Zion be rising up to make his circuit thro' his churches, to display his glorious power and grace among them, may it not raise our hopes, and encourage us to look out for his marching toward us, to make good that word, Zech. xiv. 7. *It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.* That is, when it was not expected. And, oh! what a pleasant surprize would this appearance be to all the lovers of Zion!

II. The 2^d. head is to enquire who may be said to have lost their summer-days, or their likely seasons of grace. Tho' we can't be peremptory about any, while life remains, yet of some there may be sad grounds of fear, that the text is too applicable to them, *Their harvest is past, their summer is ended, and they are not saved.* Such as—1st. Those who have had the Spirit long striving with them, and they have resisted all his motions and operations, so that he is quite withdrawn from them. The case of such is very hopeless, according to Ezek. xxiv. 13. 2^{dly}, Those who persist in sinful courses, and harden their necks against all challenges and reproofs for the same, we see what is said of them, Prov. xxix. 1.—3^{dly}, Those who come the length to sin presumptuously, that is, venture upon sin against light, in hopes of repentance and pardon, their case is dismal, according to Num. xv. 30.—4^{thly}, Those who provoke God, by their bentness on sin, to cease to be a reprover to them, to strike both conscience, and ministers dumb, that they challenge them no more, Ezek. iii. 27. Hos. iv. 17. 5^{thly}, Those who deliberately relapse into sin, after rods, convictions, resolutions, and vows, Isa. i. 5.—

6thly, Those who give themselves up to commit sin with greediness, and glory in it, Eph. iv. 19. Phil. iii. 19 — 7thly, Those who despise all gospel-offers, and mock the messengers who bring them, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. Alas! such have reason to fear *their harvest is past*, &c. Their case is very hopeless, tho' none can say it is past the reach of sovereign grace

III. The 3d head is, to enquire into the causes of men's losing their hopeful seasons. — 1st, It proceeds from their unbelief and doubting of the certainty of gospel truths. This keeps many hovering so long between heaven and hell, death and life, Christ and the world, that their summer and harvest days are gone before they come to a resolution. Did men believe the certainty of wrath to come, and that they are born heirs of that wrath, they would think no motion swift enough in fleeing to Christ, and closing with him in order to escape it.

2dly, Many trifle away their summer days and seasons of action, because they look on death and eternity at many years distance, and that they will have time enough, before these expire, to mind salvation-work. By this delusion, Satan cheats many out of their most hopeful seasons. Did men look on death as within a step of them, and having no more but a single thread to cut, so that within a few days they shall either be singing with the saints in heaven, or roaring with the damned in hell, they would not let their summer days pass so idly.

3dly, Promising summer-days are lost thro' indulging of sloth. Many, before they will be at some pains now in prayer and secret duties, will venture upon endless pains in hell hereafter. Oh! prodigious folly! What pains was Christ at to save you, and will you be at none to save yourselves? Hath not God an eternity of rest and pleasure to

recompence your small toil and pains in improving your summer days!

4thly, Love of sensual delights and carnal company proves a snare to many. . They are hereby drawn into idleness, games, pastimes, tippling, foolish talking and jesting, and other sinful pleasures; whereby their summer-days are trifled away and mispent. Even these diversions which are judged the most innocent, ought to be used with fear and caution, lest they steal away our heart and thoughts from our chief concerns; which if they do, they are not innocent, but hurtful. Oh! they are sad diversions that would divert us from Christ and heaven. It is unbecoming a Christian that looks for eternal delights in another world, and pleasures of a higher nature; to have his heart set upon the pitiful delights of this earth, which fly away as a dream, and leave nothing behind them, unless it be a sting in the conscience for spending days of grace so unprofitably. One hour's enjoyment of Christ's presence and favour hath far more pleasure in it, than many years of sensual delights.

But for shortning this discourse, I must pass several things I had in view, and proceed to

The APPLICATION.

Infer. 1st, Doth God in his mercy afford men hopeful seasons for saving their souls, summer-days of youth; harvest days of gospel-grace? O how lamentable must it be to see men wasting away these seasons by delays, putting off conversion-work and closing with Christ from day to day, till both their summer and harvest are past. When conscience or God's Spirit press them, they answer with Felix, *Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I'll hear thee*: meaning nothing but to put off

the present conviction. Oh! Sirs, the work is so weighty and necessary, you can't make too much haste to expedite it; it is work for your immortal souls, and work for eternity. How careful would a man be to improve a day, if his natural life depended upon it? If a condemned man had an hour allowed him to beg his life from his prince, would he think he might delay till some minutes of it were past! No, he would apply at the very first, and use the most moving words and arguments he could devise to obtain it, and leave nothing unessayed during that hour. But oh! Is there not much more at stake here? When the salvation of the precious soul thro' all eternity depends upon the improvement of the present summer-day of grace! It is your wisdom to take the morning rather than the evening of it. The morning is fittest for beginning a journey, you would call him a foolish traveller that would set out only when the sun is setting.

Infer. 2. How much are they to be blamed, who waste away their precious seasons of grace, in pursuing foolish lusts and pleasures, who take God's time and their soul's season, too, to do the devil's work in. Oh, Sirs! doth God create pleasant summer and harvest-days for you to serve the devil, his grand enemy? Wretched ingratitude! Or, Do you think that God should wait till the devil, the world, and the flesh have done with you, and then be content to take their leavings? Be ashamed of so requitting the Lord, and dealing so with your Maker. O foolish people and unwise!

Infer. 3. Surely, gospel-slighters, and neglecters of the seasons of grace, must have an uncomfortable death-bed, seeing the mournful ditty of my text belongs to them, *Our harvest is past, our summer is ended, and we are not saved.* Oh! how cutting must the review of wasted summer-days be to you when

death calls upon you! It will be so far from yielding you any comfort at that time, to call to mind your carnal company and converse, your jests and sports, your games and pastimes, your tippling and idle talking, that the very remembrance of these will increase your sorrow.

Infer. 4. We may hence justly conclude gospel-slighters to be men beside themselves, and without the free use of their reason, seeing they act a part below the very brutes and insects. These observe the proper seasons in providing for winter. But ah! you neglect yours in providing for eternity. 'The stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; the turtle, the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming, Jer. viii. 7. The ant provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest, and all to lay up for winter,' Prov. vi. 8. But ah! you let your souls summer and harvest-days pass over without minding the winter of death, or providing for them when dislodged of the body. It must surely be the height of madness to trifle away the season which is given you for saving your souls thro' all eternity. If sin had not wofully bemisted your eyes, you would have been ready to have looked upon him as a monster or mad-man, that had but a few days to win or lose his soul for ever, and yet would be playing these away at cards and dice, or trifling them away in jests and diversions, tippling and idleness, and never once minding the saving of his soul! And yet how many of all ranks may I apply to, and say, *Thou art the man!*

Infer. 5. If gospel seasons be the summer and harvest for our souls, it must be our unquestionable duty and interest to improve them with the greatest care, by complying with the Spirit's motions, and the gospel-offers, by closing with Christ, 'and giv-

ing all diligence to make our calling and election sure; for if the proper season for these be lost, the work cannot be done at all. You are all careful to observe the seasons for your secular profits. The husbandman his season for plowing, sowing and reaping; the merchant his time for attending fairs and markets; the mariner his time when the wind is fair for sailing. And ought not you much more to be observant of your summer and harvest seasons of grace? Remember, and believe it, O trifler, the time is at hand, when you will be put to cry, "O for one of these summer-days again! O for one of these sabbaths or communion-seasons, wherein I had the free offers of a crucified Christ! O how would I prize it; but alas! a thousand worlds, had I them to give, cannot recal one of them to me." It was a vain wish of that poor woman when dying, O call time again, call time again. No no, a summer-day or a harvest-day cannot be recalled; therefore be wise to spend them with fear and care, while you enjoy them.

May the Lord bless gospel-seasons to us. Amen.

Of a public Spirit.

S E R M O N II.

O N

JEREM. viii. 21. *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt, &c.*

THE Doctrine which now falls to be handled, is,

Doct. II. That every gracious spirit is a public spirit, and will lay to heart the calamitous case of the church or country whereof he is a member.

So did Jeremiah here, and in several other parts of his writings, as in Jer. ix. 1. Jer. xiii. 17. and in his book of Lamentations: Such public-spirited persons also were Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Paul, and other scripture saints.

The method of handling this doctrine may be,

I. To enquire into the nature and evidences of a truly public spirit.

II. To shew the reasonableness and necessity of a public spirit.

III. Make application.

I. As to the first, to wit, the nature of this public spirit which is in gracious persons, especially as it is evidenced by their holy zeal, and concern for the church under distress: it doth imply several things.

1st, A sincere love to Christ, and concern for his glory, which prompts us to prefer the things of Christ to our own things. If we love not Christ the Head, we cannot have a true love to his body the church, nor a concern for its welfare. It is this love that makes gracious souls *prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy*, Psal. cxxxvii. 6.

2^{dly}, There is in it, a sympathy and fellow-feeling with the church in distress, as being members of the same body. We see every living member of the body feels the injuries which are done to it, or to any of its fellow-members, and is ready to act for their relief: So the eyes and hands are ready to help the leg or foot when hurt, as feeling the smart of it. In like manner the members of Christ's body mystical have a fellow-feeling together and are ready to act for the relief of each other in distress.

3dly, It imports not only a deep concern and sorrow for the church in trouble, but also a disposition to express and evidence this concern, by using all the means in our power to help and relieve her; such as fasting, mourning and weeping for all the sins, whether of ourselves or others, which draw down wrath and calamities upon the church; and wrestling with God by earnest prayer for her relief, looking to Christ and his blood for pardoning and removing those sins which have raised the storm against her. Thus did Nehemiah, Daniel, Ezra, David, Jeremiah, and others.

II. The 2d head, is to shew the reasonableness and necessity of this public spirit, and zealous concern for the church in distress. Now this will appear from several grounds and considerations; such as,

1st, The near relation to, and interest which Christ hath in his church: The church is his building, his household, his peculiar treasure, his jewels, and dear purchase; yea, she is Christ's body, of which he is the head. Now, if you have any love to Christ himself, you cannot be unconcerned for the church, which is so nearly related to him, when she is in trouble. If you love the Head, you cannot but love the body also. — Again as Christ's relation to the church is near, so his love to her is proportionable; he compares his love to that of a tender mother's to her sucking child, which she cannot forget: and therefore *he engraves Zion upon the palms of his hands, and hath her walls continually before him*, Isa. xlix. 15, 16. In that expression, he alludes to the practice of the Jews in shewing their concern for Jerusalem in ruins, during the Babylonish captivity: They engraved the effigies of Jerusalem upon their rings, to keep her in perpetual remembrance: In like manner, saith the Lord, I have the

church engraven upon the palms of my hands, so that I can never open my hand to bestow a blessing upon any, but the church's case presents to my eye. Now, if God so loves the church, and is concerned for her welfare, it becomes us also to be concerned and affected for her.

2dly, This affectionate concern is reasonable and necessary, because your interest. Every one of you is nearly connected with that of the church, as being members of the same mystical body, who must suffer one with another; so that in seeking the public good of the church, you consult your own private interest also; for your own prosperity is bound up in her welfare. You are like passengers in a ship, that have your persons and all your effects along with you there; so that, if the ship be prosperous you are well, but if she sink you lose all. Your precious souls in particular must suffer when the church doth suffer: They cannot but be reduced to a melancholy situation, when the church is distressed with spiritual judgments: such as the plague of dry breasts, and the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from ordinances. If the mother be sickly, the sucking child must languish.

3dly, To be public-spirited makes a man a public blessing, and an instrument of much good to others, which is a man's greatest honour. This would make you resemble your heavenly Father, who doth good to all, by making his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon them. And also like your Saviour, who was a public blessing while on earth, for he still went about doing good, Acts x. 38. And like Abraham, who was a blessing to the nations, Gen. xii. 2. Job was a man of a noble public spirit, upon which account he was had in the greatest love and esteem, respect and reverence by all ranks; when the ear heard him, or the eye saw him, they

blest him; why? because (saith he) *I delivered the poor that cried, I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, &c.* Job xxix. 11, 12. &c.

4thly, Because God's glory suffers when the church suffers, *for Zion is the seat of his glory*, Psal. lxxvi. 1, 2. It is the church that doth display and shew it forth. God's revenue of honour and praise in the world would come to little, if God had not a church therein to pay him his rent: hence he calls his church *the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified*, Isa. lx. 21. The rest of the world embezzle their talents, but God's church and people improve theirs for God's glory. Now when these are suppressed and sunk, they are disabled for shewing forth his glory. Nay, then the enemy is ready to insult them, and to reproach both them and their God. Hence king Hezekiah called the time of Jerusalem's distress, *a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy*, Isa. xxxvii. 3.

5thly, Because God is highly displeased with a public spirit, and with those who interpose for his church in trouble; he represents himself in scripture as seeking carefully for these to put marks of honour and respect upon them, Jer. v. 1. Ezek. xxii. 30. Also we see what singular honour God put upon Moses and Phineas upon that account, Exod. xxxii. 11, 14. Numb. xxv. 10, 11. Psal. cvii. 23, 30, 31. Also he promises prosperity to all such, and familiarity with himself, Psal. cxxii. 6. Isa. xlv. 11.

6thly, Because on the other hand, God is much displeased with those who are unconcerned about his church when in distress, yea, he denounces a *Wo against them who are at ease in Zion, and are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, Amos vi. 1, 6. And we see what wrath was threatned against Esther, if she should be easy or silent when the church was in danger, Esth. iv. 14. *For if thou al-*

together hold thy peace at this time, then shall enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed.

The A P P L I C A T I O N.

Infer. 1. If God be well pleased with those who are sensibly affected with the church's case when in distress, how flaming must his wrath be against those who are the instruments of her distress, and instead of sympathizing with her in it, do rejoice in her trouble: O that such would know that they are not only the enemies of the church, but they are the enemies of God, and the very butt of his anger every day, Psal. vii 11. How dreadful is their case, who have the poison'd arrows of God's wrath levelled against them!

Infer. 2. If it be the character of gracious souls to be concerned for the church, what a bad sign must it be of those who mind their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ? of whom the apostle speaks, Phil. ii. 21. And alas! how many are there amongst us who have their minds and affections wholly set upon the earth? They are warm, keen, and anxious about the concerns of their bodies and families, but cold and indifferent about the things of Christ and his church: They, like Gallio, care for none of those things, Acts xviii. 17. If their bodies or friends be in distress, they are troubled; but tho' the church of God be in affliction, it gives them no uneasiness; which is a sad sign they are not living members of Jesus Christ, for if they were, they would have a feeling and sympathy with the body.

3dly, We may take up a lamentation for the want of a public-spirited and generous concern for the church of God among us, which is this day in

great danger and distress by errors, divisions, and decay of piety : And yet how few are laying it to heart? Ah! whence doth this indifferency proceed? Surely, from want of love to Christ the church's head, or from excessive love to the world, and carnal pleasures. When men *ly upon beds of ivory, chant to the sound of the viol, and drink wine in bowls, they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph,* Amos vi. 4, 5, 6.—Again, this indifferency about Christ's matters, proceeds from that cursed root of self-love, and self-seeking, which is in all men by nature, tho' in the mean time sin and Satan have blinded their eyes, that they know not their true interest : they know not what it is rightly to seek themselves ; if they seek the good of their bodies with the neglect of their souls, they think to seek themselves best this way ; but oh ! if their eyes were opened, they would see that this self-seeking, is nothing but self-hating and self-destroying. The rich glutton fancied he was seeking himself and his own happiness, when he clothed himself in purple and fared deliciously every day ; but afterwards when he lifted up his eyes he saw his self-seeking was really self-destroying, for by pampering his body a little time, he damned his soul for ever. So that those who serve God best, by seeking his glory and his church's good, before their worldly interest, do really seek themselves most ; for they hereby secure the happiness of both soul and body thro' all eternity.

4thly, It may be needful here to give some caution against the wrong use of this doctrine, which some may be in hazard to make, by spending their zeal and concern about the public case of the church to the neglect of their own personal case. Oh, Sirs, beware of this extreme, and suspect this zeal not to be of the right sort ; for where there is a sincere

regard to God's glory, it will shew itself in the first place in seeking to have matters right at home, to have your own soul's case put in good order, to have a true faith in Christ, the nature renewed, and corruptions subdued, without which you can never glorify God, or do any thing to please him: Likewise it will shew itself in esteeming and preferring the great and essential truths of the gospel, and desiring to hear of the excellency and usefulness of a crucified Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit's dealing with souls in beginning and carrying on a work of grace. Now when these sweet truths are not so much relished, as to hear reflections and censures upon the management of public affairs, you have ground to be jealous that your deceitful hearts are carrying you to an extreme, and to a zeal for the church, which is not right. True zeal for God will make you careful to be acquainted with your own hearts, to have matters right in the first place between God and your own souls, to have humility, truth and sincerity in the inward parts, without which God will not dwell, nor hold communion with you, nor can you claim God's promises of guiding and direction in dark and dividing times; for it is not the proud or self-conceited Christian that hath the promise, but the humble and self-denied, Psal. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* Study always then to be meek and humble, and in order thereto to be acquainted with your own deceitful hearts, which will be fair to deceive you if you be not on your guard. Watch then, and let never your concern for the public draw you off from private duties, nor from secret and heart-work; for some may make very splendid appearance for public things, and yet prove nothing at last but cast-aways, for want of personal godliness. But by

telling you this, let none think I encourage any to turn Gallios with respect to the matters of God, and the interest and welfare of his church, as, alas! the generality are; no, I teach and press the contrary.

5thly, Let all therefore be exhorted to be public spirited, and suitably concerned for the church in distress. O lay to heart her calamity, and shew your concern for her relief, by mourning for sin which brings on wrath, and praying earnestly for deliverance from it, saying with David, *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

Motives to it: 1st, From the pattern of our blessed Lord and Head, whose example we should copy after in his sympathy with, and concern for the church in trouble. *His soul was grieved for their misery: In all their affliction he was afflicted.* When they are persecuted he feels himself injured, and this sympathy sets him on work to interceed for them, as he did for Jerusalem under the Babylonish captivity, Zech. i. 12. *O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years.* Let all the members then follow the example of their Head.

2. Public-spirited persons are the pillars of societies, and bear off wrath and judgments from them. Hence we see the flood could not rise to destroy the old world, till Noah was shut up in the ark; nor could the fire be rained from heaven upon Sodom till Lot was housed in Zoar; and both Noah and Lot were public-spirited men, and therefore great blessings and pillars to the world. O Sirs, this public-spirited disposition would make you blessings to the church and to the island: It would make you live desired, and die lamented: men

would reckon your lives worthy of many prayers, and your deaths of many tears. Elijah was of this disposition, and we see how Elisba bewailed his departure, 2 Kings ii. 12. *And Elisba saw it; and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof:* meaning, that Elijah was the safety and strength of Israel, by his prevalency with God; and a better defence to them than chariots and horsemen.

3dly, This disposition is a good evidence both of love to God, and of love to the souls of men: for it is of the nature of true love to be concerned for the good of those whom we love, to mourn when they suffer, and rejoice when they prosper. If we love God, we will lament the dishonours which are done to him. If we love the souls of men, we will pray for their conversion, and bewail their sins which bring destruction upon them.

4thly, It would be a good means to save you from the guilt of other mens sins, and secure you from the wrath which they bring on. For they who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst of Jerusalem have a mark set upon them for their preservation, Ezek. ix. 4. God looks upon our mourning for the sins of others, as an entering of our dissent against them, and so will not charge them upon us.

Quest. How shall we attain to this public spirit, and zealous concern for the church in distress?

Ans. Take the following directions:

1. Beg for the Spirit of God that dwells, breathes and acts in all the members of Christ's mystical body. He surely is the public Spirit that inclines all the members to take the same care one for another, and to seek the good of the whole body, Rom. viii. 14.

2dly, Let the grace of love abound in your hearts, love to God and to all his people; and see to keep this holy fire always burning. Love makes the wants and sufferings of others to be our own, and prompts us to lay out ourselves for them.

3dly, Love the society of the public-spirited and zealous ones of the land, and particularly those who study to manage their zeal with piety and prudence; for as iron sharpens iron, so the conversation of such may be the means of enlivening you.

4thly, Beware of carnal company, which oft proves a dangerous quench-coal to zeal and activity for God. Peter found this by going into the society of the high-priest's servants; for tho' he got his hands warmed amongst them, he got his heart miserably cooled to Christ and his people.

Lastly, When you attain to any measure of zeal and public-spiritedness, endeavour to manage it with holy wisdom and caution, so as you may recommend this grace to others, and not stumble them at it thro' your mismanagement. There is much need for this caution, especially in reeling and dividing times; wherefore take these advices.

1. See that you act from a principle of true love to God, which will engage you to love all who bear his stamp and image.

2. See that your ends be pure and sincere, not to gain esteem or applause, or increase a party; but that God may be glorified, and Christ's kingdom advanced in the world.

3. Watch carefully that your zeal do not mix itself with your own passion and bitterness of spirit, which we are always in hazard of: the apostle James doth nobly caution us against this evil, Jam. iii 14. to the end. A cause sometimes may be good and just, and yet managed with too much heat and animosity against our godly brethren. Job's

friends were good men, and expressed much zeal for God and religion in their speeches, but yet God was displeased with them for mixing their zeal with so much bitterness and rash censures against his upright servant Job. Wherefore if conscience oblige you at any time to oppose them who are godly see that you do it with much calmness, tenderness and caution; and take care that your zeal do not degenerate into passion, bitterness, or hatred against any of them. Mind what the centurion said to the chief captain, when going to scourge Paul, Acts xxii. 26. *Take heed what thou doest, for, this man is a Roman* So say I, take heed what you do to any man that is a member of Christ.

Object. Are we not called to contend with earnestness when matters of faith are at the stake? according to Jude, ver. 2. *Ans.* 1. All points of truth are not of equal weight and importance, and therefore not to be contended for with equal zeal and concern. — 2. Zeal and meekness are very consistent, and not opposite; so that there may be zealous and earnest contending with truth without wrath and passion. — 3. Be persuaded that the wrath of man never worketh the righteousness of God; yea, wrath or passion is the worst thing that can be brought into a religious controversy, for as a bad cause is never made better, so a good cause is always made worse by it. The glory of God doth not need such rotten pillars to support it, as our wrath and passion, or our bitter and angry words. Alas! it is the rash using of the tongue that greatly inflames our differences, namely, by personal reflections, rigid censures, uncharitable constructions, evil surmises, aggravating the mistakes of others, &c. This the wise man observed of old, Prov. xv. 1, 18. Surely the tongue is an unruly member, and full of deadly poison. May God of his infinite mercy give us grace to govern it aright, for Jesus Christ's sake
Amen.

The Diseases of Souls.

S E R M O N III.

O N

JEREM. viii. 22.

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then is not the health of the daughter of my
people recovered?*

THE words being before explained, and the doctrines raised, I proceed to

Doct. III. viz. However desperate the diseases of those within the church may seem to be, yet if they die of them, it will be owing to themselves, seeing they have an able Physician, and excellent balm to look to for healing.

This being the doctrine which I chiefly intended to insist upon, I propose to do it at some length in the following method.

I. I'll enquire into these dangerous diseases for which there is balm in Gilead, and a Physician there.

II: Take notice of some of these dangerous symptoms which make our diseases appear desperate and incurable, for which there is yet balm in Gilead.

III. Speak of the Physician there, who hath the balm, and applies it for curing the diseased.

IV. Enquire into the nature of the balm, and means which the Physician makes use of for healing.

V. Touch at the Physician's method of applying the balm, and performing the cure.

VI. Make application of the whole.

I. The first head, is to enquire into the dangerous diseases of those within the church for which the balm is provided. And for the better understanding hereof I shall premise some things.

1. When I speak of the church, I mean the church visible, which includes hypocrites as well as true believers.

2. Though the strength and power of the soul's diseases be broken in believers by renewing grace, yet there is no disease in the unrenewed, but believers are in part liable to it, and have the relicks of it to groan under, while they are here below.

3. I am not to speak of the diseases of the body natural, which is the province of physicians; nor of the body politic, or civil society, which is the business of politicians and statesmen: though in the mean time the abounding of these at this day is so visible to all, that we have ground to bewail and mourn over them before the Lord. Ah! the diseases of our body, both civil and ecclesiastic; are so great and lamentable, that we may justly apply that word to ourselves, which we have in Isa. i 5, 6. *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores.* Such a case indeed is mournful, yet, blessed be God, it is not desperate: There is balm in Gilead for the state as well as the church, and we should plead with the great Physician in Israel to pity both, and heal their respective diseases. Thanks be to God that he is both able and willing, and that he gives us such promises to plead with him, as these following in Isa. i. 25, 26. 'And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righte-

ousness, etc. ——— And that in Isa. xix. 22, 23. Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried on their shoulders; and kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers, etc. And that promise in Isaiah lx. 17, 18. 'I will make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness, violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise.' Now, it is surely the duty of all members of both church and state to plead these promises with God, and to wait his time for accomplishing them to us. O what is there so hard, but the out-pouring of his Spirit can do?

4. The diseases which I propose to speak of in this place are the sins of spiritual plagues and distempers of men's souls, which are very dangerous and deadly; these we ought all to know, with their symptoms and effects, that we may seek after the balm in Gilead, which is mercifully provided of God for our healing. God would have every man to know the plague of his own heart, 1 Kingsviii. 38. This every man should know and be acquainted with in the first place, in order to healing; though yet we are not wholly to confine our thoughts and care about those diseases which are private and personal, but shew our concern also about those which are public and national: of which more afterwards.

5. These soul-distempers are called, in scripture, diseases, wounds and sicknesses, Psal. xxxviii. 5. and ciii. 3. and cxlvii. 3. Ezek. xxxiv. 4. Matth. ix. 12. because they produce effects in the soul, like to those which diseases produce in the body: such as, 1. As

diseases waste the beauty of the body, and produce uncomeliness and deformity in it, Psal xxxix. 11. As they make the eyes sink and turn dull, the skin shrink up and gather blackness, and flesh melt away, and bones stick out, and the most beautiful person to look pale and ghastly : So our sins and spiritual distempers destroy the comeliness of the soul, deprive it of its primitive beauty, the image of God ; and bring upon it a most ghastly deformity, and make it resemble both brutes and devils, the one in sensuality and lust, the other in pride and malice.—
 2. As diseases weaken the body and make it unfit for labour ; so sin weakens the soul, and makes it unfit for spiritual work and exercises, as prayer, hearing, meditating, &c. so that the duty becomes a burden to it. — 3. As diseases deprive men of their appetite for food, and of their digestion ; so sin takes away the soul's appetite and digestion, that it hath no hunger for the bread of life, for communion with God, and the influences of his Spirit ; and though the man attends ordinances, he doth not digest what he hears, nor is nourish'd by it.—
 4. Diseases occasion pain in the body that it cannot rest : so sin brings anguish and torture into the soul. Hence David complains of his bones being vexed, and his soul being sore vexed, Psal. vi. 2, 3 These things being promised, I shall mention some of those dangerous diseases of the soul, for which we need the balm in Gilead.

I. *Atheism*. Infidelity or misbelief of divine truths revealed to us is a deadly disease, for it hinders the success of the gospel, and the saving of souls. What is it that keeps many halting so long between two opinions, and hovering betwixt Christ and the devil, but their not believing firmly the Bible to be God's word, and the gospel-tidings to be certain truth : namely, that God sent Jesus Christ, his eternal Son,

into the world, to assume our nature, and die for sin in our stead : and their not giving firm credit to the being of a God, the immortality of the soul, and the life to come. Tho' many will not openly question any of these truths, yet the wavering thoughts they have about them hinder them from falling in with the gospel method of salvation, which God hath established. Ah ! this is a deadly disease ! Also, there is much practical Atheism among us : many profess to own God, and yet live as if they believed there was no God that made the world, and no providence that governs it : they pay God no homage nor respect ; they put the creatures or self in God's room ; they ascribe their mercies to fortune, or to their own wisdom or industry, rather than to God. A woful disease ! God's children indeed are cured of prevailing Atheism, yet the dregs of the disease do remain, and sometimes atheistical thoughts come to a great height in them, as in Asaph, though afterwards he was heartily grieved and ashamed for entertaining them, and calls himself both a fool and a beast for it, Psal. lxxiii. 21, 22. And no wonder he did so, for Atheism and infidelity, tho' it abound in the church, yet there is no such disease in hell, no such madness there, for the devils believe and tremble, James ii. 19. But tho' the disease be grievous, yet Christ hath balm for it, and to him we must go both to help our unbelief, and increase our faith.

II. *Ignorance* of God and of gospel truths is a mortal disease, and destroys many, even of those who profess to know him, according to Hof iv. 6. There are multitudes living in the midst of gospel-light, who yet continue in gross darkness. They are ignorant of the infinite justice and holy nature of God ; and of the misery of man in his fallen estate, of the evil of sin, and the ransom necessary

for it. They are ignorant of Jesus Christ and his mediatory offices, and of the nature and necessity of Christ's righteousness, and of faith which applies it to us. They know nothing of the Spirit's office in our redemption, nor of his work in regeneration; yea, they do not so much as know, if there be a Holy Ghost. Alas! that this disease of ignorance should still prevail, notwithstanding all the means of knowledge we enjoy. I grant believers are spiritually illuminated, and get the strength of this disease broken at their first conversion, yet still much blindness doth remain with them; and frequently clouds of darkness do so overshadow them, that they have but faint views of divine mysteries. This is a sad disease, but yet there is balm in Gilead, and eye-salve in Israel for it; Rev. iii. 17, 18 Jer. xxiv. 7.

III. *Hardness* of heart is a ruining disease to multitudes. Oh! it is this that makes them sit under the ministry of the word, and hear the most terrible threatnings and curses denounced against their sins, and yet be no more moved than the seats they sit on, or the dead that lye under their feet: so hard is the stone in their heart, that the hammer of the word in the hand of man makes no impression upon it; promises draw not, and threatnings drive not; mercies do not allure, and judgments do not alarm: this is a prevailing plague among the generality of gospel-hearers. And though believers at conversion have the heart of stone taken away, and a heart of flesh given, yet they are much plagued with recurring hardness, that oft makes them complain of being little affected either with ordinances or providences; and tho' the fire burn round about them, that they lay it not to heart. This is an evil disease, yet there is balm in Israel, and help in the promises, for it; Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Phil. i. 6.

IV. *Earthly-mindedness* is a woful disease; it clogs the mind and unfits the soul for spiritual work. The thoughts of the world shut out the thoughts of God and eternity: they tempt many poor souls, like Martha, to be carefully troubled about many things, even things which will not avail them at a dying hour, while the one thing necessary is quite neglected and forgot. Ah! what numbers are there dying of this disease? when other plagues kill their thousands, this slays its ten thousands. O what havock doth it daily make among professed Christians? Pharaoh's words concerning the Israelites may well be applied to many of them, *Exod. xiv. 3. They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.* So hot are they in pursuing the world, so busied in providing for their families, in paying their debts, in making bargains and purchases, and in courting the favour of men, that they can find no time in their lives, nor room in their hearts for precious Christ, and the concerns of their souls. O sinners! this disease of earthly-mindedness doth quite defeat the design of the gospel; and marr your profiting by sabbaths and sermons; it turns the house of God into a place of merchandize, by your thoughtfulness in it about worldly gain and profit. What a fearful distemper is this, that turns a man's head and heart where his feet should be! that makes him bestow his soul and all its noble faculties upon a little white and yellow clay! and so all his days dig for dross and dung with mattocks of gold! Nothing can cure this disease but the balm of Gilead. The prevailing power of it is indeed broken in believers at conversion, the world is then put down from the throne and chief place in the soul; yet afterwards it doth rally its broken forces, and struggles hard to recover the throne again; and this proves very troublesome even to the best.

It distracts their thoughts, molests them in holy duties, and steals away their affections from Christ and heaven. This is a sore plague, yet there is balm in Israel and help in God's word and promise for it, Cant. iv. 8. Jer. xxxii. 4. Col. iii. 1, 2.

V. *Aversion* to spiritual duties is a sore disease, when the heart becomes backward to pay God a visit in secret, and the man unwilling to go to his closet to converse with his Maker. Ah! this is the case with many, who would rather toil their bodies a whole day, than spend a quarter of an hour upon their knees with God in secret. Their animal spirits are vigorous and lively in pursuing their worldly business, or even their diversions; but they are low and faint in soul-work and spiritual exercises. We see many, they do not weary to spend whole days, yea, and nights too, in drinking, dancing, gaming and serving their lusts: but they grudge to give God so much as one day, or any part even of his own day. They say of sabbaths and sermons, *What a weariness is it? When will the sabbath be gone?* This is a prevailing disease, and how strong are the dregs of it even in believers! For tho' at conversion their hearts are reconciled to God and his ways, yet at times they feel much of a recurring backwardness for spiritual work, so that when they would do good, evil is present with them. But yet there is balm for this disease, in the Physician of Israel, and his gracious promises, Psal. cx. 3. Isa. xl. 31. Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

VI. *Indwelling corruption*, prevailing and venting itself various ways, is a sad disease. Sometimes it rises like a flood, swells high, and carries all before it, like the current of a tide that cannot be withstood. So it is with those in whom the strength of corruption was never subdued by converting grace. And tho' the tide be turned with renewed persons,

yet upon some occasions we find them making great complaints of the prevalency of indwelling sin, through the power of temptation, as Paul, Rom. vii. and David, Psal. lxxv. *Iniquities prevail against me;* and Isa lxxiv. 6. *Our Iniquities like the wind have taken us away.* This is a most humbling disease; yet the Physician of Israel hath provided balm for it in his word, Psalm lxxv. 3. Mic. vii. 19. Rom. vii. 24, 25.

VII. *Hypocrisy* and *formality* in God's service is a woful disease. When men draw near to God with their lips only, and give him no more but bodily service, which is no better than that of a statue on a tomb, with eyes and hands lift up, only it wants a voice. And how unpleasant is a voice to God without the heart and affections? He heavily complains of it, Isa. xxix. 13. Among the unrenewed, hypocrisy is a deadly and reigning disease. And though the converted be delivered from its reigning power, yet they are sadly distressed with its remains, and oft put to complain that they give God more of the body, than of the heart in duty; and that their prayers are little better than lip-labour. But the physician of Israel hath promised balm for this disease, Jer. xxxi. 33. Prov. iv. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 16.

VIII. *Inconstancy* and *wandering* of heart in duty is a prevailing disease. Alas! for the unfixedness of the heart that goeth out in many vain excursions towards the world and its trifles, and even in time of the most solemn approaches unto God! Hereby our religious performances are wofully marred, and God provoked to loath and abhor them. There is a voluntary and habitual wandering of heart, that is the reigning plague of the unregenerate: and there is an involuntary wandering, that is the disease of God's people, which they bemoan and lament be-

fore the Lord. But there is balm in Gilead for it in all shapcs, Jer. xxxii. 29. Ezek. xi. 19.

IX. *Backsliding* from the Lord, or a *spiritual consumption*, is the common disease of God's people. They are liable to backslide from the power and life of godliness, and to lose their former spirituality and liveliness in serving God in their closets, families and public assemblies; so that sometimes, their religious duties are like to wither and dwindle away into a dead form, and *the things that remain are ready to die*, as it was with the church of Sardis, Rev. iii. 2. This decay comes upon them when known sin or sloth are indulged by them. Then it is that spiritual exercises become a weariness, and aversion grows to heart-work and secret duties, such as prayer, reading the Bible, meditation, and communing with their own hearts: Then the graces do languish, the faith of divine revelation becomes weak. Then truths which God reveals concerning his glorious perfections, the excellencies of Christ, and concerning sin and duty, heaven and hell, make but small impression on the mind. Then repentance is restrained, and the soul is little affected with sin and its evil: then love turns cool to Christ and his image, it doth not constrain to duty, nor to hate and mortify sin as before: then hope becomes faint and languid, and hath not such desirous expectations of the eternal world, and things unseen, as to fortify the soul against the allurements of the devil, the world and the flesh. This spiritual consumption is a mournful disease, and calls us speedily to apply to the Physician of Israel for the balm he hath promised for it, Deut. xxx. 6. Hos. xiv. 4, 5, 6. Psal. lxxix. 32. John xiv. 19. Gal. ii. 20.

X. *Discouragement* and *down-casting* of soul is one of God's people's diseases that requires this balm. They are often cast down by outward afflictions,

and especially by the prevalency of sin and Satan's temptations, by the hidings of God's face, the shutting out of their prayers, the darkening of their evidences, the revival of former guilt, and the renewing of Mount Sinai's thunderings against them. Under these trials, they are apt to think that God holds them for his enemies, and writes bitter things against them, and hence are put to cry with the Psalmist, *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? And will he be favourable no more?* This is a disease which sadly enfeebles their hearts, and weakens their hands; yet the great Physician of the church hath provided balm for it, Psal. xlii. 5, &c. Isa. xli. 10, 17, 18. and liv. 7. &c. Isa. lvii. 16. &c. Jer. xxxi. 25. Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

XI. *Ingratitude* to God for mercies is a common disease. Alas! we turn unthankful both for common and special mercies, and for the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ to Adam's fallen race: What bad requitals do we make to God for his goodness? There are many who make use of God's mercies as darts to shoot at heaven, and weapons to fight against God himself. The more he gives them of health and money, they turn the more profane and debauch'd; so that instead of serving God with his benefits, they make a sacrifice of them to the devil, Hof. ii. 8. I fear such will be found guilty of this evil who bestow their time and money upon games and pastimes, balls and assemblies, plays and comedies, and such vanities that prove nurseries of sin, and serve greatly to debauch the minds and morals of men and women. O let us not ungratefully requite the Lord our gracious benefactor. Ah! how much of this disease doth remain even with the best? Even Hezekiah rendered not again, according to the benefit done unto him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. Great need have we all of the balm of Gilead to cure us of this plague.

XII. *Trusting* to our own righteousness is a disease which all are liable to. The unbeliever goes about to build an imaginary tower of his own righteousness, and will not submit to the righteousness of Christ the glorious Surety, who hath brought in an everlasting and law-binding righteousness for sinners to fly to. Nay, believers who have actually fled to it, do still groan under the remains of this woful disease within them. They have still a hankering after some dependence upon their duties and performances, altho' they cannot but own that their best duties need the blood of Christ, as well as their worst sins; and if they be not washed from the sins that cleave to them, they would damn them. O! then, what need have we all of the balm in Gilead, and the Physician there, for these deadly diseases which cleave to us?

Time would fail me to mention and insist upon many other grievous diseases which abound among us, such as pride, self-conceit, and lifting up of ourselves because of some attainments above others; discontentment with our lot and condition in the world; impatience under crosses, sinful self-love, intemperance, covetousness, envy, rash anger, malice, revenge, and many other deadly plagues. However lightsome many make of these distempers, yet there is none of them but what will prove deadly, if the Balm of Gilead and Physician there be not applied to for cure. But, blessed be the God of Israel, that this Balm is an universal medicine, a catholicon for all manner of soul diseases, if sinners would but seek to it, and submit to the application of it in the Physician's own way. May we all be brought to see and feel our diseases in time, that we may hasten to the great Physician of the church, while his balm and power are present to heal us. May God of his infinite mercy determine us to it for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

S E R M O N IV.

O N

JEREM. viii. 22.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there, &c.

IN the preceding sermon I mentioned many soul-diseases, which are more secret and invisible, prevailing among us: in this I shall speak of some other diseases of a more public nature, which affect not only the particular members, but, in some respects threaten the whole body of the church, and the several congregations thereof; and upon which account our poor diseased church and land do greatly need the Balm of Gilead, and Physician there, at this day.

I. *Herefy* and error is a disease which spreads like a gangrene, and doth very much threaten our church and land at this day; when doctrines are vented, and books dispersed in favour of Deism, Socinianism, Arianism, Arminianism, and other errors: when principles are espoused and spread, which tend to weaken divine revelation; to advance corrupt reason and self-love as the spring and standard of religion; to exalt our moral performances more than imputed righteousness; to reproach the operations of the Holy Spirit upon souls, with enthusiasm; and ascribe our good actions more to the power of corrupt nature, than to efficacious free grace. Now, when such errors as these, besides many popish tenets and superstitions, are propagated among us, there is ground to say, we have a sick and diseased land, that needs balm.

II. *Schism* and *division* among the ministers and members of the church is a grievous malady that we at present labour under. Surely it is a most unnatu-

ral distemper that causes the sheep of Christ to bite and devour one another, and the members of Christ to separate as aliens, yea, not only break up Christian communion, but break out in uncharitable reflections, bitterness, wrath, clamour, and evil-speaking one against another. A strange distemper! that puts those who will delightfully worshipping God together thro' a whole eternity, in such a case, that they cannot keep fellowship together here! A distemper, that makes men renounce communion with those they once delighted in, and with whom the glorious Head doth still hold communion; that takes many off from the vitals and essentials of religion, and employs their time in public controversies about party opinions, the grounds of separation, the characters of preachers, and things which rather tend to beget alienation of affections, and angry quarrels, than to promote saving knowledge, faith, love, and godly edifying. Oh! how wrath-like a judgment, is that spirit of strife and division, which God hath poured out upon this land for our former mis-improvement of the gospel, and contempt of glorious Christ! Ah, what a flood-gate doth it open to many evils and calamities! That is a true word of the apostle, James iii. 16. *Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.* What a plague must that be that produces every evil work? What a sad disease is it, that turns christian converse into vain janglings, that hinders social prayers, that mars the success of the gospel, weakens the interest of religion, propagates all kind of evil, and exposes the church to the scorn and derision of her enemies! How applicable is that word to us, Lam. ii. 13. *Thy breach is great like the sea, who can heal thee?* Surely none but he that hath the Balm of Gilead

III. *Giddiness and unsettledness* in religion is a disease that sadly prevails among us. Many are now reeling to and fro like drunken men, as the prophet

speaks, Isa. xxiv. 20. They do not, like sober men, keep the high-way in a straight course; but, like drunkards, stagger and reel from one side of the way to another. Alas, the most part are reeling either to one extreme or another, and very few are going on in a straight and steady course. Many are reeling towards defection from our reformation principles and attainments which our worthy ancestors valiantly contended and suffered for; particularly in encouraging and drawing on the yoke of patronage upon the church without necessity. Yea, pleading for it as lawful and harmless, tho' our reformers declared it to be contrary to the word of God, and the practice of the apostolical and primitive church. Likewise in compliance with that yoke, many are voluntarily falling in with courses for wreathing it upon the church's neck, and departing from several parts of our established government and discipline to which they stand solemnly engaged, such as our approved rules and practice with respect to the moderation of calls, the election and ordination of pastors; and in consequence thereof obtruding ministers into congregations against their will, whereby the church is spoiled of her right of calling her own pastors, the flock of Christ is scattered, the edification of souls hindered, the great ends of a gospel-ministry defeated, and the work of the gospel greatly obstructed. Many also are swerving from our old covenant-engagements, and openly denying the lawfulness of national-covenanting, and the binding obligation thereof upon posterity; and forming to themselves schemes of government which would open a door to anarchy and licentiousness.—Again, Many are reeling towards Erastianism, and injurious infringements upon the church's intrinsic power, and upon Christ's immediate headship and supremacy over her, falling in with acts and practices which tend to take the keys of church-power and government out of the hands of Christ and church-officers of his appointment, and put them into

the hands of the magistrate.—Also, Many are reeling from the ancient use of creeds and confessions of faith, towards a boundless toleration of all sorts of errors and heresies, asserting that neither the church nor the magistrate have any power to restrain them. Many are reeling towards the exalting of self, even putting it in the room of God, saying it is in the power of a man's free will and natural abilities to repent and convert himself, and that there is a necessary connexion between a man's moral seriousness and his obtaining of saving grace—Yea, many are warping towards popery and old superstitions, pleading for a middle state, for prayers for the dead, and for the Eucharist's being a proper sacrifice for sin: for the necessity of a priest's absolution in order to the forgiveness of sin, and of bowing to the altar, and at the name of Jesus, of observing uninstituted festivals, of using the cross in baptism, kneeling at the sacrament, the organ in praise, and other inventions of men in God's worship. Nay, many are reeling from the very fundamentals of christianity, and the doctrine of the glorious Trinity, Christ's deity and satisfaction, the necessity of supernatural revelation, and of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and the operations of the Holy Spirit; and, instead of these precious doctrines, asserting the sufficiency of reason, or nature's light, to conduct men in the way to happiness. And these Socinian and Deistical tenets are not a little encouraged by the preachers of a rational or natural religion: I mean those dry moral preachers who are more earnest in recommending a sort of Pagan morality to the world, than in shewing the excellency and usefulness of Christ for perishing sinners, and the nature and necessity of the work of his Spirit in applying his purchase, and of gospel-holiness to make them meet for heaven. who prefer a good saying, or moral precept, in some ancient philosophers, to the counsels of Jesus Christ or the dictates of his apostles; vainly opposing the dim

candle of man's reason to the sun-shine of gospel-light displayed in the holy scripture. All which do show how sadly the distemper of giddiness and unsettledness in religion prevails in our land, and how greatly we need the Balm of Gilead to cure us of it. If it should be asked, what is it that makes the land reel so? We have the answer in the fore-cited text, Isa. xxiv. 20. *Because the transgression thereof is heavy upon it* Both the transgression of the former and present age. Alas, there are many old sins little minded by us! old perjuries and treacherous dealings with God; old defections and backslidings; old persecutions and bloodshed. We have ground to fear that these old transgressions, together with those of a latter date, ly so heavy upon the land, that it is made to reel and stagger with the weight of them. O when shall we be disburdened of that load!

IV Barrenness and unfruitfulness with respect to conversion-work and the bringing forth of children to God, is a grievous malady which the church's womb seems to be smitten with at this day. Ah! how little is the doctrine of regeneration and the new-birth known and experienced among us! How rare is conversion work now, in respect of former times! Our ears have heard and our fathers have told us what days of the Son of Man have been seen in our land, when the Captain of our salvation took to himself his great power, and mounted his white horse of a triumphant gospel, and rode thro' our cities and congregations, with his crown on his head, his bow in his hand, and his sword girt on his thigh, going forth conquering and to conquer. When the arm of the Lord did thus awake and put on strength, how glorious were the effects! the preacher's tongue was loosed, the hearers hearts were melted; the word of the Lord did run, and the gospel had free course. The enemies of the power of godliness were filled with confusion and astonishment, and made to acknow-

ledge that God was among his people of a truth. Mockers and curious persons were catch'd by the word, and hundreds have been wrought upon by one sermon, and made to date their conversion from it. The angel came down and troubled the waters, and multitudes of diseased souls slept in at once, and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Such pleasant seasons have been of late in some parts of New-England, and in others of the plantations: may the Lord continue them there, and cause them to spread thro' all our colonies in America. May he send them also to Britain and Ireland, and to the poor land where he hath had his dwelling in times past, that so "the wilderness and solitary place may be glad for them, and the desert may rejoice and blossom as the rose, the glory of Lebanon may be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon." Then should our land sing as in the days of old.

Quest. Oh, what may be the reason of the unfruitfulness of a preached gospel in the land where Christ hath had his glorious marchings in times past?

Ans. Surely we must justify the Lord, and leave our complaints upon ourselves. A holy God is provoked to withdraw his Spirit from the assemblies of professed Christians because of their formality and hypocrisy, their divisions and contentions, their satisfying themselves with bare ordinances without the God of ordinances, with communion-occasions without communion with God. The Holy Spirit and his gracious workings are so far from being sought after, that they are scarce credited or believed, nay, by many they are reproached with the odious names of enthusiasm, whimsical notions, and melancholy imaginations. And may not God, in his righteous judgment, make ordinances a miscarrying womb and dry breasts to them?

Again, God by our sins and backslidings is provoked to call off the stage a godly and faithful set of ministers

and Christians, who stood in the gap, and wrestled for God's presence and Spirit to ordinances, without sending others to fill their room; nay, instead of that, to suffer the church to be plagued with a set of earthly minded preachers and students, who give sad discoveries of their carnal motives and ends in pursuing after the priest's office, that it is more to win stipends than to win souls, to get bread to themselves, than to get glory to God. Which surely is a fearful judgment and token of wrath against a poor sinful land.

Likewise, God is provoked to leave ministers, and deny them success, because of their defection from the uprightness, piety and zeal of our godly ancestors, from their humility and self-denial, from their single aims at God's glory and the salvation of souls, from their dependence upon God, in the exercise of faith and prayer, for his presence and blessing upon their labours, and from their travelling in birth till Christ was formed in their people's souls.——And finally No doubt, many ministers are unsuccessful by reason of the grudges and prejudices which they beget in their people's breasts against themselves, for swerving from reformation-principles, and concurring in violent settlements and intrusions upon parishes, whereby people are tempted to abhor the offerings of the Lord; and ignorance, error, profanation of the Lord's Day, immoralities and disorders are greatly encouraged. From whence it is too evident, that ministers are to be blamed as well as people for the present barrenness under the means of grace. O! that both they and we were helped to see the cause, and to cry for the Balm of Gilead to cure us of it.

The Second Head. I proceed to the second Head, in the method I laid down, to wit, to take notice of some of those dangerous symptoms which make our diseases seem incurable and desperate; for which there is yet Balm in Gilead, and a Physician there.

I. It is a dangerous symptom, when the body is universally distressed, and when there is a complication of diseases on it, and some of these of contrary natures.—Then the patient's case is very hopeless, and the cure much despaired of, because what is good for one disease is bad for another. Thus alas! it is with the body of Christ in our land. The church is sick not in one part, but over all, as it was in the prophet's time, Isa. i. 5, 6. *There is no soundness in it, nothing but wounds and diseases* of divers sorts. In some parts of the house a dangerous fire is kindled, in other parts deadly diseases, as tympanies, fevers, dropies and lethargies do prevail. One part is blown up with pride, another is in a fever of strife; another part is drowned in sensuality, and another deadened with a lethargy and spirit of slumber. And these diseases are of so contrary natures, that what is physic for the one, is death for the other. We may say with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxvi. 12. *We go through fire and through water*: two contrary elements, what expels the one, cherisheth the other. Now, when our case is so desperate, is there any remedy for us? Yes, the Balm of Gilead is a medicine that suits the most complex and dangerous case: see what David says of it, Psal. xxxiv. 19. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.* This he also found to his own sweet experience, Psal. xlii. 7, 8. *Deep calleth unto deep, at the noise of thy water-spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me: yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.* David was like a ship wreck'd man, almost swallowed up with the sea-billows from beneath, and at the same time near drown'd with spouts of rain from above. Not only the powers of hell and earth were against him, but heaven seem'd angry with him too. But praises be to our glorious Physician who hath balm to answer the greatest varie-

ties and contrarieties of our distempers. David blest him for it, Psal. ciii. 2, 3. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, who healeth all thy diseases.*

II. It is a deadly symptom, when the body is in a violent hot fever, attended with great inflammations. This is very much our case; our distemper is hot and violent, and our wounds much inflamed with the old serpent's poison, and the rage and passions of men; yet the balm of Gilead can cure the most deadly wounds and inflammations; it can take out of them, not only the venom of the serpent's sting, and the heat of man's rage; but also the inflammation of God's wrath, which is worse than either.

III. When diseases are of long continuance and rooted in the body, the cure is hard, Deut. xxviii. 59. Such are our maladies, which make us ready to say, there is no hope. Yet the Balm of Gilead can cure the oldest and most rooted distemper. It can heal those who have been distress'd for many years, as soon as those who have been ill but a few days. The Physician of Israel can as easily raise up his people when their bones are dry, as when just new dead, Ezek. xxxvii.

IV. When all about the diseased look on their case as desperate, we lose hope. This is our case, all who view the church, look on her as sinking: and even those of most faith are putting the question, *Can these dry bones live?* And we are apt to say of ourselves, with the poor captives, Ezek. xxxvii. 11. *Behold our bones are dry'd, our hope is lost, and we are cut off for our part.* Yet even when all give up the case as desperate, the Balm and Physician in Gilead can effectuate a cure. We have an astonishing promise to the church in such a case, Jer. xxx. 17. *For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord, because they called thee an outcast, saying, This is Zion whom no man seeketh after.* Her case was hopeless, and therefore neglected by all, but even in

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that case the Balm of Gilead can bring health and cure, Jer. xxxiii. 6.

V. A disease is the more dangerous, when its threatening symptoms are not observed, so as to provide timely remedies. Ah! this is very much our case, we observe not our dangerous symptoms, tho' *the fire be kindled round about us, we lay it not to heart: the impending clouds of wrath and judgments do not alarm us, so as to make us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord.* The present calamities which we groan under, as scarcity and decay of trade, war and blood-shed, losses and disappointments, the grievances of church and state, do not make us see the Lord's hand in them, nor hear his voice by them, so as to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and turn to him with mourning and supplication, as he calls us: But we still go on in our old courses without relenting. Our case is not unlike that of God's professing people of old, Isa. lvii. 17. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him, I hid me, and, was was wroth.* And yet after all these tokens of God's anger, it is added, *He went on frowardly in the way of his heart.* Now, can there be any remedy for him in such a case? Yes, the Lord saith, there is even balm in Gilead for such a desperate condition, and, which is most surprizing, that the Physician will come himself and apply it, as he adds in verse 18. *I have seen his ways, and will heal him.* In these hopeless circumstances I will step in myself, with the balm in my hand which will heal him of his frowardness and perverseness, when nothing else can. Now who could have expected such a word in such a desperate-like case, and that there could be balm for such a froward distemper of heart! One might have thought God would have added, *I have seen his ways and will damn him.* But instead of that he says, *I have seen his ways, and will heal him.* Oh! the condescending goodness and mercy of God to the chief of sinners.

VI. A disease is judged desperate and incurable, when the patient loses his senses, or turns lethargic, that he cannot be awakened. Ah! we are become lethargic under our maladies, we have lost our spiritual senses in a great measure. Our hearing is gone, we hear not the voice of rods, nor the voice of mercies, the voice of conscience, nor the voice of God's word, nor do we set about the duties they loudly call us to. Our sight is departed from us, we see not the Lord's hand in his dispensations; when mercies come, we receive them like brutes, without seeing the hand that gives them, or rendering thanks to the giver. When afflictions come, and the Lord's hand is most visible in them, yet we see it not, like those, Isa. xxvi. 11 we see not the Achan, the sin which is clearly pointed at by the rod. Why? because a spirit of slumber and of deep sleep, hath fallen down upon ministers and professors, which hath closed their eyes, according to Isa. xxix. 10. — Our feeling is almost gone, we feel not the weight of sin, nor the stings and upbraidings of conscience for it, we groan not under the burden. We smell not the sweet savour of Christ's name, nor the precious ointments of his graces and comforts which draw souls unto him, Cant. i. 3, 4. — We taste not the sweetness that is in the promises, and in the fruits of the blessed apple-tree. Alas! sabbaths and fast-days, sermons and sacraments do not relish with us as in times past. Now these deadly symptoms of our diseased church and land, when we view them, make our maladies seem incurable, and our case desperate; yet when we look to the balm of Gilead, we see a remedy for them. We find the same symptoms in the case of Jerusalem, which made her wounds and bruises seem incurable, yet, saith the Lord, Jer. xxx. 17. *I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds.* And Jer. xxxiii. 6. *Bekold I will bring health and cure, and reveal unto them the abundance of peace, and truth.* — May the Lord take compassion

upon our helpless and hopeless condition, and accomplish these his gracious promises to our diseased land, for Jesus Christ's sake *Amen.*

Who is the Physician.

S E R M O N V.

O N

JEREM. viii. 22. *Is there no Balm, &c.*

H E A D III.

I Proposed in the 3^d place to speak of the Physician who hath this balm for us. God himself is our Physician. He is *Jehovah that healeth us*, Exod. xv. 26. Our cure is the work of the whole Trinity, but especially of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who came to the world with a commission to heal souls. This commission he opened and read at the beginning of his ministry, Luke iv. 18. and still after owned it to be his business to heal souls, Mat. ix. 12, 13. In this office of a Healer, he was held forth and typified of old by the brazen serpent that healed the stung Israelites, John iii. 14. and by the *sun of righteousness* that riseth to us with healing under his wings, Mal. iv. 2. and by the *tree of life*, whose leaves were for the healing of the nations, Rev. xxii. 2.

The Lord Jesus Christ being God-man, is nobly qualified to be our soul-Physician; for, 1. He hath infinite knowledge and skill for taking up all diseases, with their causes, and the proper remedies for them, so that he can never mistake the case of the afflicted, nor make wrong applications for their cure. 2. He hath sovereign authority and almighty power, whereby he can command diseases to come and go at his

pleasure. 3. He hath infinite pity and readiness to help the distressed: as he hath in him the compassions of a God, so he hath also the bowels of a man, which endows him with a peculiar tenderness of heart towards us, as being touch'd with the feeling of our infirmities; and hence he is inclined many times to come to the sick without being sent for, to the poor who have nothing to give him, and to be found of them who never sought him. On this account Christ is represented by the good Samaritan that came to the wounded man that fell among thieves, and was lying by the way-side in a helpless case; the distressed man sent not for him, but he came of himself, he pitied him and took him up, and poured wine and oil into his wounds. 4. He hath wonderful patience towards the distressed, he doth not leave them for their unthankful carriage, and the abuses he gets from them, but bears with them all, and resolutely goes on with his designed applications till the cure be perfected. He knows if he should cast them off, none else could take them in hand, and death would infallibly be the issue.

That the Lord Jesus might convince us the more of his compassion and readiness to heal diseased souls, he readily cured men's bodies when he was on earth, and put none away that came to him. His design in this was to encourage us to come to him with our souls maladies, and to afford us a strong prop to our faith, and an argument to plead with him, and say, "Lord, thou didst shew compassion to diseased bodies that must rot in the earth, and wilt thou not be moved with pity to precious souls that will live for ever? Did the diseases of bodies draw out thy bowels, and shall not the wounds of souls affect thee much more? Was it not thy main errand to heal souls? O reject not those which are laid down at thy feet."

The Fourth Head. I proposed in the 4th place, to enquire into the nature of the balm and means of healing which the Physician makes use of.

In the first place, the blood of Christ may justly be called the balm of Gilead, that heals souls, for it is the meritorious cause of our health and cure, and purchases all under-means of healing to us. This is evident from Isa. liii. 5. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." Our glorious Physician saw that no less than his blood and stripes, his suffering and dying in our room, could satisfy justice and obtain pardon to take away the guilt and punishment of sin, and procure the graces of the Spirit to remove the power and pollution of sin, and therefore he willingly sheds all his blood for curing us of the diseases of sin. This blood then is our healing balm. And tho' the scripture speaks of other means of healing, which our Physician makes use of, yet we are to understand that all these are used in subserviency to Christ's blood, which is the blessed meritorious mean of our cure, the only balm that procures all the other means of healing us; some of which I shall mention; as,

I. The *Spirit* of God with his saving operations in souls, is the great mean of healing, which our bleeding Saviour procured for us. He sends the Spirit to intimate the pardon of sin to the wounded conscience, and thereby cures the soul of its fears of wrath. And for curing the power and pollution of sin, he sends the Spirit to heal and change the nature, to subdue sin, infuse grace, and incline the soul to holiness. And to render the cure universal thro' all the faculties of the soul, he enlightens the understanding, renews the will, softens the heart, sanctifies the memory, makes the conscience tender and lively, and sets the affections upon right objects. Now all these operations of the Spirit are the purchase of Christ's blood, as is clear from Gal. iii. 13, 14. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

May the Lord fulfil that promise to us, for healing our sick souls and our sick land.

II. The word and ordinances of Christ are another mean he makes use of for healing our spiritual diseases. These are the leaves of the tree of life, which are for healing of the nations. As the word is a mean in the hand of Christ and his Spirit for breaking and wounding the hard heart, and therefore called a hammer and a sharp sword; so it is also a mean of healing the wounded soul, by bringing healing promises to it, and prescribing remedies against sin, according to Psal. cvii. 20. *He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.* The sacraments also are means of healing, as they seal the pardon of our sins, and bring cordials to our fainting hearts.

III. Afflictions are means of healing, made use of by our Physician. He sends crosses and losses to make us feel how bitter sin is, to cause us to search our wounds, to mourn over them, and resolve against sin for the future. Sanctified rods are the purchase of Christ's blood to his patients; they are his physic to purge away their sins, Isa. xxvii. 9. *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away their sin.* So that believers, instead of murmuring, ought to bless God for their afflictions, seeing they are Christ's physic which he hath purchased for them at a dear rate.

IV. Stupendous providences are sometimes made use of by Christ as balm for his church's diseases, when he doth terrible things which they looked not for, as in Isa. lxiv. 3. Thus he healed the fears of Israel by opening a way for them in the red-sea. He healed their murmurings in the wilderness by giving them waters out of the rock. So the Lord by stupendous dispensations and revolutions hath often brought relief and healing to his distressed church in our land, as in the years 1560, 1638, 1688, 1714, and at other times. O let us still remember the years of the right hand of the most High.

V. Faithful ministers are appointed as balm and means of healing to diseased souls. The great Physician sends them to dispense sound and wholesome doctrines for that end, 1 Tim. vi. 3. Tit. ii. 1. They are his apothecaries to weigh out, mix, qualify and prepare the medicines according to his prescriptions: This the apostle points at by a minister's *rightly dividing the word of truth*, 2 Tim. ii. 15. and Christ himself means it by the *steward's giving his household their portion of meat in due season*, Luke xii. 42. It is happy for a diseased church, when God gives them understanding of the times (like the men of Issachar) to know what Israel ought to do in difficult cases. And it is as unhappy for her, when they are left to mistake the proper means, and sometimes to inflame her wounds instead of healing them. It is the Lord that must give ministers understanding in all things, 2 Tim. ii. 7. May they be helped always to depend upon him for it.

VI. Reforming magistrates have been made use of as balm for the church's distempers, when the Lord stirs them up to restore her liberties, redress her grievances, and to use their authority to curb error and vice, idolatry and superstition, to call synods to consult about reformation, and excite ministers to their duty. Such balm were David, Solomon, Jehosaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Nehemiah to the church of God in their times. And so also were Ahasuerus, Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes, and other heathen magistrates, by the Lord's turning their hearts to favour his church in their dominions. And when the Lord's time of fulfilling his promises to her doth come, he can still make strangers to build up her walls, and their kings to minister to her: And kings to prove her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers, according to Isa. lx. 10. and Isa. xlix. 23.

VII. Godly praying persons in every station are as balm to a diseased land, and the poorest of them may

help to heal it by their prayers; even as a little child may bring physic and present it to its sick mother. O that all the children of Zion were thus employed at present, when there is such need for it. The Lord encourages them to it, by promising that the prayer of faith shall save the sick, James v. 15. and contribute to heal the whole land, 2 Chron. vii. 17. *If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked way, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.* Wherefore as long as God is pleased to preserve a praying remnant in the land, however deadly our diseases be, there is hope in Israel concerning it; seeing there is still good balm in the land. May I see Scotland never be without it!

The Fifth Head. I proposed in the next place to enquire into the Physician's method of applying the balm, and performing the cure of the diseased.

I. Our blessed Physician first makes sinners sick before he makes us whole, that is, he makes sinners sensible of their disease, by convincing them of sin and misery, and humbling them under the view of it, that so they may prize Christ and his healing balm; such are said to be sick, Mat. ix. 12. Now this preparatory sickness hath several things in it; as

1st, A discovery of the dangerous nature of our disease, sin, that it is the root of all the other plagues and miseries which we complain of; that it draws down the wrath and curse of God upon us, and puts us in a state of damnation.

2^{dly}, A solicitous care and thoughtfulness about our disease, as being of a deadly nature; which makes us restless and inquisitive about it, like the Jailor, to say, *What shall we do to be saved?* What shall we do to be healed? to get our sins pardoned, and our nature changed? Is there any balm or Physician for us?

3^{dly}, There is in it a dissatisfaction with all earthly comforts and enjoyments, as helpless things to us under

our disease. The sick man can take no pleasure in eating, drinking, sleeping, or any worldly thing, while his disease continues; bring gold, silver, honours, pleasures or friends to him, he answers like Haman, *All these avail me nothing*, while I want Christ's healing balm to my soul, which is every hour in hazard of the second death.

4thly, The sick man groans under the burden of his disease, he hath grief and sorrow of heart for sin, like the Psalmist, Psal. xxxviii. 6, 18. *I go mourning all the day long, I will be sorry for my sin.* Why? It is a disease of my own bringing on, I have given the wounds to myself, and made my soul loathsome to God. O what a fool and beast have I been!

5thly, The sick man is brought to despair of all healing and cure in his own doings or contrivances: All his former refuges and confidences are dashed in pieces, and he joins with penitent Israel, Hof. xiv. 3. *Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our Gods.* We will not any more make balm of our prayers, of our tears, or resolutions, we must seek it from another quarter.

6thly, The sick man sees his absolute need of a Physician, and of one that is skilful, and hath balm of infinite virtue, even of Christ who is able to save to the uttermost, and can cure the deepest and deadliest wounds. It is He, and He only (saith he) who hath an infinite fulness of merit and spirit that can suit my desperate malady. None but the eternal son of God can be my Physician: *O that I knew where to find him!*

7thly, The diseased man is brought to a willingness to submit to the Physician's method and prescriptions, and to say with Paul, Acts ix. 6. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Let him cut me, lance me, bleed me, purge me. Let him put me to what pain he pleaseth, let him lay me never so low, I'll submit. Let him prescribe a potion never so bitter, I'll drink it. Let

Christ do with me what he will, if he cure my disease, all is well. I will not haggle with him for a right eye, or a right hand, or any darling sin, or any thing dear to me in the world; no, every thing shall be parted with at his command. — Thus the sinner by the great Physician's power and skill is made sick and sensible, humble and willing, in order to prepare him for the healing balm.

II. Another step which the Physician takes to cure the diseased man, He by his Spirit works faith in his soul; that is, he powerfully persuades and enables him to embrace Christ as his Saviour, and apply the balm of his blood and merits unto his wounds, for removing guilt, pardoning sin, and reconciling God to his soul. Now when this is done, the danger of death is over, John v. 24. *He that believeth shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life.* Faith is a healing grace, for it is the instrument which applies the healing balm of Christ's blood to the diseased soul. Every touch of faith's hand brings healing, nay, every one of its looks is healing, Isa. xlv. 22. *Look unto me, and be saved.* Thus a look of a stung Israelite brought healing to his wound. So Peter's look to Christ healed him of apostacy. Hence Christ said to several diseased persons, *Thy faith hath made thee whole.* So here, when once faith applies Christ's blood, the guilt of sin is cured, its reigning power subdued, and the strength of the disease is broken, it will not prove mortal.

Quest. How shall I know whether I have got this healing faith, faith which hath made me whole?

Ans. See whether it hath the evidences of a healing faith? 1. Hath thy faith brought thee to a peremptory resolution to ly at the Physician's door, and look to him alone for healing, saying, If I die, it shall be at Christ's door, for there is no other name given under heaven, nor among men, whereby I can be healed. — 2. Hath thy faith made thee fall heartily in with the

gospel-method of healing, and to approve it as a beautiful contrivance, and say, "God's covenant of grace is well ordered in all things, and suitable to all my maladies; Christ the Mediator of it is a noble Physician and complete Saviour, and therefore I chuse him in all his offices, and accept of all his prescriptions for my diseased soul: I accept of his blood to wash me, his righteousness to cover me, his Spirit to sanctify me, his word to direct me, and his laws to govern me."—

3. See whether thy faith hath determined thee to open frankly to thy Physician, and entertain him in the best rooms of thy soul. When Christ knocked by his Spirit, did thy faith make thee willing to yield and surrender all thy powers and faculties to him? Didst thou bring the keys of all the rooms of thy soul to Christ, and particularly of thy will, saying, "Lord, come, chuse where thou wilt lodge, where thou wilt lye, and what thou wilt have, for all I have is devoted to thee, and at thy command." Now, O man, if thou hast got such a faith as this, then thy faith hath made thee whole. The healing balm is applied, the cure begun, and shall assuredly be perfected at length.

III. Another step of the soul's cure, is by the renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit. As soon as the Physician gives faith to apply the balm, he takes the soul into his hospital, places him among his patients, whose disease is broken, and who are on the way of recovery. He takes every believing soul under his special care, he kindly visits and attends them, and carries on their cure by his Spirit's renewing and sanctifying work: And this he doth by degrees, for the wounds which sin hath given our natures are so deep, that they take long time to heal; nay, it will take all our days before the cure be finished. But though the cure be slow, it is sure.

Quest. By what steps or degrees doth the Physician carry on the cure in believers?

Ans. 1st, By his Spirit in regeneration; he cures the mind of its blindedness, the heart of its hardness, the nature of its perverseness, the will of its backwardness, the memory of its slipperiness the conscience of its benumbedness, and the affections of their disorder; all this according to his gracious promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. *I will take away the stony heart, and give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.* It is by his Spirit within us that the cure is carried on.

2^{dly}, He heals his people by intimating peace and comfort to their disquieted souls; and assuring them that God's anger is turned away from them. As the grant of pardon cures the guilt of sin, so the Spirit's intimation of it pacifies the troubled conscience, and brings healing to the bones which were broken by sin. The believer's sore still runs in the night until this doth come. Now when the Physician is pleased to quiet his people's minds, comfort their drooping spirits, and deliver them from the apprehensions of God's wrath, he doth remarkably advance his healing work in them, according to Psal. xxx. 2, 3, &c. Psal. vi. 2. Hof. xiv. 4.

3^{dly}. He carries on the cure of his people by sanctifying their natures, infusing grace and holiness into all the faculties of their souls, and adding new measures and degrees thereof from time to time. Increase of grace and progress in sanctification is a continual healing of the disease of sin, according to Mal. iv. 2. *The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall grow up as calves in the stall.* Healing and growing are there join'd together. The more we grow in sanctification, the more our cure doth advance. This growth indeed is often insensible in believers, yea sometimes they will be seized with new distempers, and be getting new wounds, so that the work would seem to go back; yet notwithstanding, the virtue of Gilead's balm will infallibly prevail in order to the perfecting of the soul's cure.

4thly, He carries on his healing work by cherishing weak grace in his people, and blessing the means of grace, for strengthening and increasing it; and so he makes good his gracious promise and character; Mat. xii. 20. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench* We have an instance of this in the case of Thomas: how tenderly did he blow on his smoking flax, and cherish his weak faith! John xx. 27. *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing.*

5thly, He advances the cure by weakening indwelling sin and corruption, and removing those distempers which hinder the growth of grace; he looses their bonds, and frees them from their fetters and straitnings in duty, and sets them at liberty to *walk before the Lord in the land of the living*: and even to *sing in the ways of the Lord*, Psal. cxxxviii. 5.

6thly, He causes his North and South wind with their healing influences to blow upon their gardens and spices, and so puts life in their graces, and draws them forth to exercise in performing of duty. Thus he quickens faith to embrace and rest on a crucified Jesus, and kindles love to entertain him; and he sharpen the soul's appetite after its food.

7thly, He carries on the cure in his people, by giving them new discoveries of Christ and of his fulness and suitableness to their needs, to draw out their faith and love to him. This was one great design in sending the Spirit into the world, John xvi. 14. *He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you.* Now how doth he glorify Christ, but by shewing them his fulness and excellency, and making them willing to part with all things for Christ and his righteousness, and content to borrow all they want out of Christ's fulness, and to make Christ their *all* in justification, and in sanctification, and in glorification. The

more the soul makes use of Christ and lives near him, it is still so much the nearer to perfect health.

8thly, The Spirit carries on the cure in his people by causing them to breathe after a full conformity to Christ and his image, that their sanctification may be compleated, and they freed of all complaints of indwelling-sin and imperfect services. Hence they are made to cry with David, Psal. cxix. 5 *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes*: And with Paul, Rom. vii. 25. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* The stronger the soul's breathings are of this kind, the nearer it is to perfect health and cure.

IV. The last and finishing step of the diseased soul's cure is at death; it is only then that the soul is made perfectly whole. Then it is that our great Physician by his Spirit pulls up all the roots and seeds of the disease, and makes the soul perfect in holiness, and meet for entering into heaven, where only a state of perfect health is enjoyed. It is in heaven only that sin and misery, diseases and complaints can find no place, and all pain, sorrow and crying shall pass away. There, all Christ's recovered patients shall have perfect and uninterrupted health thro' all the ages of eternity. May we then have grace to be always looking out and longing for that happy state and healthful place, where the inhabitants shall never say they are sick, being all forgiven and healed of their sin and iniquity! May our blessed Physician fit us for that place, by beginning, carrying on, and compleating our cure from the disease of sin, by all those ways and means of healing which he hath appointed, that to his name may be ascribed glory in the highest, thro' endless ages. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VI.

O N

JEREM. viii. 22. *Is there no balm, &c.*

I NOW proceed to the last thing proposed in the method I laid down, *viz.*

The A P P L I C A T I O N.

I. This doctrine serves to inform us of the amazing riches and divine love in providing a Physician for our diseased souls, and such a Physician as Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God! One that hath infinitely more knowledge and skill than all the angels in heaven: One that hath infinite compassions wrapt up in human bowels: One that hath both a tender heart and a tender hand, Psalm cxlvii. 3. One that suffered his side to be opened, and his heart to be pierced, that his blood might become balm for our wounds. Behold an astonishing cure! a matchless Physician! Other physicians are prodigal of their patients blood, but sparing of their own; but our glorious Physician saves his patients blood, and pours out his own: And of it he makes an incomparable balm for our wounds.

Again, we may see what cause we have to bless God for his distinguishing goodness to Adam's diseased family in general, and to our diseased land in particular. The angels that sinned, had no Physician sent to them, but we have a matchless One sent to us the sons of men. There are many opulent nations in the world who never heard the news of this Physician, and his healing balm; but they are proclaimed in all corners in Scotland. These have the gold and riches

of the Indies, but want the balm of Gilead, which is of infinite more value, than all they have.

II. We may improve this doctrine in an use of lamentation for the sick and distressed case of our land, and multitudes of souls therein dying of their wounds, notwithstanding the gospel offers of the glorious Physician and his excellent balm which they have in plenty. Need I to say any thing to instruct our distressed and mournful condition? Surely, if the abounding of infidelity and immorality, excess and extravagance, error and schism, divisions and breaches, jealousies and animosities, complaints and grievances; if divided minds and disjointed hearts; if reelings and staggerings, if altar against altar, if doctrine against doctrine, if worship against worship, if post by post, and threshold by threshold, be symptoms of a diseased land and church that needs the balm of Gilead; then may we conclude our case is bad, and our need great. Ah, now it is a sickly time with the land, and multitudes are so distressed, every corner is like an hospital or infirmary, and few of them are cured. How many are languishing and dying around us, of one disease or another, either of the plague of unbelief, the stone of the heart, the giddiness of the head, the gangrene of error, the fallen sickness of apostacy, the palsy of unsteadiness, the lethargy of security, the tympany of pride, the frenzy of passion, the cancer of envy, the leprosy of vice, the dropsy of drunkenness, the fever of lust, the running ulcers of outbreakings, inward decays, consumption of spiritual strength, or some other spiritual distemper? Ah, our diseases are past reckoning. What numbers about us are seized with feebleness of knees and weakness of hands, so that they can neither bow down the one, nor lift up the other in prayer, to their Maker, and yet never are sensible of their misery, nor enquire for the balm of Gilead, or the Physician there!

We may take up a lamentation over the sick and dying among us, as the prophet did over the Jews, in the verses following my text, Jer. ix. 1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people.* Oh! what slaughter doth the plague of sin make in houses and families both in city and country! There is reason for a greater cry among us, than that in Egypt, when their first-born were slain: Of which it is said, Exod. xii. 30. *And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house, where there was not one dead.* But ah! our case is worse, for we have many houses, where there is not one alive, but all dead spiritually, and ready to die eternally. This alas! is the case of this poor land, notwithstanding the sovereign balm that abounds in it.

Quest. Whence is it that so few are healed, when the balm and Physician are so near?

Ans. The cause is surely in us: For, 1st, Many are not sensible of their diseases, nor feel their wounds: They want a principle of spiritual life, and have no sense of pain; and hence they complain not of their inward plagues or ill hearts. The dead have no feeling, no care, no fear. And therefore many ignorant people say, they have good hearts to God, and do thank God for it. Alas! the most part are dead, see no need of this balm, and will not apply it.

2^{dly}, Many are in love with their disease, more than with the Physician. They may perhaps speak against sin, and even pray against it, but in their hearts they desire not that God should hear them. God may say to them as in Psal. lii. 3. *Thou lovest evil more than good.* And how can such expect to be healed?

3^{dly}, Many neglect the season of healing, and do not seek after the Physician and his balm in due time. They slight Christ and his gospel offers in the days of youth and health, and never begin to enquire for him till it be too late.

4thly, Many will not trust Christ wholly for healing, but have a squint eye to other physicians, as to their duties, prayers, tears, &c. But my friends, either Christ must have the sole honour of your cure, or he will not be your Physician.

5thly, Many will not submit to Christ's prescription for healing; they will not take the bitter potion of self-searching, or repentance, or contrition, or godly sorrow; nor swallow the pill of mortification, or self-denial; and therefore they remain unhealed. O that we could lament over them, and bewail their case before the Lord.

III. A 3d use of this doctrine may be of consolation: And surely the news it brings of the incomparable Balm of Gilead, and the Physician there, may afford comfort to the sick church and land wherein we dwell, however distress'd her case be. Tho' it is our duty to bewail it, yet we are not to mourn as those who have no hope. Her wounds indeed are deep, and her breaches wide, yet her case is not desperate while there is Balm in Gilead, and a Physician there. Surely the Balm hath not lost its virtue, nor the Physician his compassion towards us; nay, we have still pregnant instances of his mercy and pity, amidst the wrath-like dispensations towards Scotland, which are signs that our good Samaritan hath not passed by us on the other side, like the Levite, but keeps in the way where we are, and looks with pity on our wounds, willing to apply his balm to them. Yea, his bowels do still yearn to us, as of old to Ephraim, and make him say, *How shall I give thee up, O Scotland? How shall I deliver thee? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.*

Object. Seeing it is notorious that the Physician hath given up many famous churches, when their diseases were desperate; what ground have we under such dangerous symptoms to expect he will pity us, and apply his balm for our recovery?

Ans. We have still several grounds of hope ; such as,
 1st, Seeing the Lord hath begun to pour out his
 vials upon Antichrist, we may conclude he will not
 cease till they be all poured out : and seeing thereby
 Antichrist hath been in a deadly consumption these
 200 years past, he must surely expire at length. And
 tho' sometimes he may seem to recover a little, yet the
 Lord assures us, that he will at length *consume him*
with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy him with the
brightness of his coming, 2 Thess. ii. 8. By which he
 means his coming in the brightness of gospel-light, at-
 tended with the down-pouring of his Spirit. Now,
 when we hear of the Lord's causing his gospel sun-
 shine to arise and spread in any place, with the out-
 pouring of his blessed Spirit, for convincing and con-
 verting of souls; the Lord encourages us to look out
 for the coming of his kingdom, and the downfall of
 Antichrist.

2^{dly}, We have encouragement to hope from that
 prophecy in Rev. xvii. 16. which foretels that the
ten horns or kingdoms which formerly supported
 Antichrist shall be instruments of his destruction ; it is
 said, *They shall hate the whore, and make her desolate.*
 Now the Lord hath made Britain one of those ten
 kingdoms that hate her, and therefore he will still
 preserve (as formerly he hath done in the most peril-
 ous times) a godly remnant that shall be the prevailing
 party there, to accomplish that grand design. And
 seeing the Lord is raised up out of his holy habitation,
 and hath already begun the work, he will surely carry
 it on, finish it at last, however it be interrupted, and
 things appear unlikely for a time.

3^{dly}, We may draw hope from the second psalm,
 and other scripture texts, in which God the Father
 promiseth to ' give his Son the uttermost parts of the
 ' earth for a possession, and that the isles shall see his
 ' salvation, and wait for his law,' which places do take
 in Scotland, a nation, (tho' remote and despised,) to

which the Lord hath shewed a distinguishing respect, by sending the gospel early to it, advancing reformation to a great pitch in it, pouring out his Spirit remarkably on it, taking it solemnly into covenant with himself, appearing often for the interest of religion when almost sunk in it, and raising up deliverers for it when oppressed by enemies. Now these signal proofs of our Redeemer's kindness, give us ground to hope he will not give up the land that from eternity was given him by his glorious Father, and that in time was so solemnly surrendered to him by our fathers, who are now at their rest.

4thly, There is a mourning and praying remnant in the land, who are greatly affected with the want of God's Spirit and presence in ordinances; who desire to lament after the Lord, and to sigh and cry for all the abominations found among us. And tho' the glory of the Lord be gone up from the cherub, yet it seems still to hover and stand over the threshold of the door, and many are pleading and protesting against his departure: And God hath a regard to the prayers and tears of a faithful remnant, Psal. xii. 5. Ps. cii. 13, 14.

5thly, It is a hopeful token for the land when there is a stir and noise among the dry bones of the young generation, when these are awakened, and brought under convictions, and persuaded to turn from their old customs and companions, and to look towards Christ and heaven. Blessed be God for what is to be seen of this in some places: O that it were general, and over all! This would be a pledge of God's continuing of his abode with us; for he will not forsake the work of his own hands, nor abandon the pledges of his grace. Wherefore let us earnestly wish and pray to see more of the Spirit's work among the young in our day.

6thly, Many of God's worthies, who are now in glory, have gone off the stage in the belief and persuasion, that God would yet arise and have mercy on

his Zion in this land, that he would signally build her up, and appear in his glory, yea, that there would be more glorious gospel-days seen in Scotland, than they or their fathers had beheld; and we are encouraged to hope that God will not let the words of his dying faints fall to the ground.

7thly, The accounts we have lately got of the effusions of God's Spirit, and the displays of sovereign grace in the conversion of souls, thro' the English plantations in America, and other parts of the world, give us ground to hope that God is about to accomplish his promises to his church in the latter days, when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Now if the King of Zion hath already begun his circuit, as if he design'd to ride in triumph thro' his churches, can we think he will pass by Scotland, where he hath a waiting and a wrestling remnant, looking out, and ready to stop him with their cry, and even to cast forth a flood of tears in his way? O! will not ancient kindness then revive, and his heart warm to his covenanted land, where his dwelling hath been, and his goings seen in the times of old? O! may not poor Scotland also plead for a visit, according to the multitude of his tender mercies? Indeed the divisions of Reuben, and our long degeneracy, may occasion great thoughts and searching of heart about our case: yet the foregoing considerations may encourage us to wait and pray in hope, however dark and cloudy the day be, especially seeing our blessed Physician hath not taken away his healing balm from us, but doth still preserve it pure in the land.

Quest. Seeing there is balm in the land, and the Physician willing to apply it, why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? How is it that Scotland's wounds are so long a healing?

Ans. I. God in his wisdom may order it so, that our wounds may be more laid open, and the corruptions thereof better discovered for our deeper humilia-

tion. So God kept Israel wandering *forty years in the wilderness to humble them and prove them, and to know what was in their heart*, Deut. viii. 2. The continuance of wounds and grievances is needful for the trial and discovery of many; for thereby such who were under covert, are made known, and the corrupt distinguished from the sincere: the falseness and rottenness of many had not been made evident, if wounds had not been so long kept open, and grievances continued.

II. The cure may be postponed to take our hearts wholly off from creatures, and to convince us of the insufficiency of all other physicians beside the Physician in Israel. We do not naturally come to God, until we see there is help for us no where else; while there is any view of relief from creatures, we go first to them; so we find when *Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound*, the first physicians they sought to were the Assyrians, and king Jareb, who could not heal them, Hos. v. 13. Upon which account we see the judgment is not only continued, but increased; for the Lord saith in the following verses, that he will not tear, but go away from them; and his design therein is to make them turn to himself as their only Physician, which at length they are brought to, for, Hos. vi. 1. *they say, Come and let us return to the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up*. It would be a happy effect, if our disappointments from the creatures would humble us for our sin and folly, and bring us off all things, to look to God himself only for healing.

III. Diseases continue unhealed when the causes thereof are secret and undiscovered. We see Israel continued in a distressed case, as long as Achan's accursed thing lay hid in his tent. All the humiliation and prayers of Joshua and the elders of Israel, Josh. vii. could not heal them, till the accursed thing was laid open and discovered. And this should put us on to

try and search more narrowly, if there be not some secret sin of this land undiscovered, some Achan in the camp, some Jonah hid under deck, which makes the sea to work, and grow more tempestuous; so that let mariners row as they will, there is no getting into the harbour of peace. Surely some accursed thing is overlooked by us, such as our old covenant-breaking, persecution, bloodshed, our contempt of the Lord Jesus, our giving the world his room, &c. May these hid evils be discovered, which continue our storm, and perpetuate our diseases, so that there is no healing for us.

IV. Our wounds are so long a healing, because we do not submit to the Physician's directions; we will not abstain from things which inflame our wounds, such as the invading of the rights of Christ and his church; nor humble ourselves for old and late sins: we will not put honour upon free grace, nor make use of the balm of our Physician's blood: we decline to set about extraordinary fasting, humiliation and prayer, and say, What a weariness is it! We do not cry and wrestle for the down-pouring of the Spirit, that only can apply the balm, and heal our land, but look to other medicines. Many, alas! tho' they complain of their disease, are not willing to part with it, but have a secret liking to it. Were we once brought to see our disease, to value our Physician, to be wholly resigned to his will, and to say with Paul, *Lord, what wilt thou have us to do?* there would be hope in Israel concerning us.

IV. A 4th use of this doctrine may be of examination. And I would exhort every one to try if they be yet healed of the disease of sin; I mean, if they have yet come to Christ, and got his healing balm applied to them. For tho' believers are not perfectly cured in this life, yet when they come to Christ by faith, they share of the healing virtue of his blood, and are put in the way of healing: The force of their

disease is broken, and the Spirit takes them under cure. Examine yourselves then, if the healing work be begun in you. I offer you some marks of it, see if you can apply them to yourselves.

1. Were you ever brought the length to have such a sense of your sores, and such a feeling of your wounds, as to be content to give all the world for the Balm of Gilead to them? Such a lively feeling where it is, is a hopeful token; whereas those who are still easy about sin, never saw it so as to hate it, or make serious enquiry for the Physician, their wound is unhealed.

2. Is your drought abated, I mean, your thirst after sin and the world; are you now out of love with them? this saith the strength of your disease is broken. But if you be still in love with the world, or any predominant sin, or go on in sin without remorse, your disease continues.

3. Have you a better appetite for your food than formerly? do you relish the ordinances and means of communion with God more than before? it is a good sign. But if you have no liking to these, your distemper remains.

4. Have you got a high esteem of your Physician, and a heart affection to him? it is a good token: for it is natural for people to esteem and love those who have cured their diseases, and saved their lives; so was it with the blind man, John ix. that was cured by Christ: he had a great esteem of him, and all the reproaches cast upon him by his enemies, could by no means alter his thoughts of him.

5. It is a good sign if you make your Physician kindly welcome to your heart and house; if you give him the best entertainment you have, and guard against every thing that would offend him. But those who shut their doors against the Physician, and refuse access to precious Christ, they are still under their disease.

6. Can you abide the light better than before? Are

you brought the length to love searching sermons, and those ministers that would search to the bottom of your wounds, in order to a more thorough cure? Are you more desirous than ever to have sin discovered? Then it is a good sign. But if you shun the light, and desire, like sick persons, to have the curtains drawn upon you; or if you love those prophets best who would heal your wounds slightly, and only skin them over to you, saying, *Peace, peace, when there is no peace:* as those in Jer. vi. 14. then your disease still remains.

7. Do you now see more and more of the vanity of all other medicines besides the balm of Gilead? If you now see the utter insufficiency of the balm of your convictions, resolutions, prayers, tears, reformati^ons, duties, &c. to heal your wounds, it is a good token: but if you are still trusting to any of these, you remain unhealed.

8. Have you attained to the frame of the thankful leper, who when he was healed, turned back, fell down at Christ's feet, glorified God, and gave him thanks? As in Luke xvii. 15, 16. Have you got humble and thankful hearts? Do you desire with the Psalmist to bless the Lord with your souls, and all that is within you to bless his holy name, for healing your wounds and diseases! As in Psal. ciii. 1, 3. then it is a good sign.

9. Are you more able for labour and service than formerly? Do you find more strength than willingness to run on God's errands, fight his battles, and perform commanded duties? It is a sign of recovery: for we see what is foretold concerning the happy effects of this Balm of Gilead in gospel-times, Isa. xxxiv. 5, 6. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the lame man shall leap as an hart.*

10. Have you a holy jealousy and fear of every thing that may occasion a relapse, and bring back the disease upon you? Do you watch against the temptations of Satan, and the snares of evil company, or any thing that might entangle you, or draw you into sin?

That is surely a good sign. We see what Christ said to the impotent man whom he had healed, John v. 14. *Behold thou art made whole, sin no more.* As it is the duty, so it will be the inclination of every healed soul to guard against wounding itself any more. It will be the earnest desire of that soul that it may not go back to the house of Jonathan, and its former distressed condition again. Now if you can apply one or more of these marks to yourselves, then you may conclude that Christ hath taken you under cure: his balm is applied to you, and the work of healing is begun. May we all feel this in ourselves, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

Exhortation to come to Christ for healing

S E R M O N VII.

ON

JEREM. viii. 22. *Is there no balm in Gilead? &c.*

V. **H**AVING improved the Doctrine in several uses, I proceed to a 5th Use, namely, of Exhortation. And here, in the name of the Lord, I exhort and beseech all poor diseased souls, to come to the blessed Physician Jesus Christ, who hath excellent balm for healing all their wounds and diseases, be they never so desperate. O sick souls, why are you so unwilling to come and be healed? If your bodies be sick, and a famous physician near, there is no small stir in riding and travelling to him for help. But tho' your souls be deadly sick, and in immediate hazard of eternal death, and the great Healer just at hand; how little motion is there amongst you towards him! how

amazing is the stupidity of the world, which is no better than a common hospital! Tho' every man in it be like the man that fell among thieves, Luke x. 37. robbed, and deadly wounded; yet very few are groaning for this good Samaritan to come and bind up their wounds. How desirable would it be to see diseased sinners come flocking to Christ with their soul-maladies, like the inhabitants of Genesareth with their bodily ailments, when Christ landed among them, Mark vi. 55, 56. there it is said, *They ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment. and as many as touched him were made whole.* Well, did Christ refuse liberty to any of these sick persons to touch him? No, they were all welcome, whatever their sickness was, be it never so deadly or desperate. And this our blessed Jesus caused to be recorded here for your encouragement to come to him with your soul-distresses. O to see such a stir among you about your souls, as was among that people about their bodies! Where else can you go with them, but to Jesus Christ the only Physician of souls? If you go to other physicians, it will just befall you as it did that poor woman which had an issue of blood twelve years, Mark v. 26, 27. She went to many physicians, and spent all that she had, and was nothing better, but grew worse, till at last she came to Christ, who cured her for nothing.

In prosecuting this exhortation, I shall address myself to several sorts of diseased souls. I. The insensible and secure. II. The sensible and feeling. III. Those who are in the way of healing and recovery.

I. I begin with the insensible, those who know not their diseases, nor feel their wounds, and therefore see no need of the balm of Gilead, or the Physician there. As there are multitudes killed by ignorance, so great

numbers are undone by self-flattery. Many apprehend themselves to be sound and whole, who in the mean time are mortally sick and dying. Solomon saith there is a generation of such self-conceited persons, Prov xxx. 12. In such a case was the church of Laodicea, Rev. iii. 17. How foolishly did that proud Pharisee flatter himself? Luke xviii. 11, 12. He thought himself perfectly well, sound and whole, when his soul was deadly sick, and ready to drop into hell. In like manner do many deceive themselves. Ah! they never communed with their own hearts, never took their souls aside to enquire if they be yet under the mortal disease wherewith they were born; or if they have gone to the soul-Physician for his healing balm. In order to awaken such secure thoughtless souls, consider these few things:

1. While you are insensible of your disease, your case is highly dangerous and miserable. Why? 1. You are unconverted, un sanctified, and dying in your sins, John viii. 24. To die in your sins is infinitely worse than to die in a dungeon among serpents; for these cursed serpents your sins, will go to the grave with you as your companions, and to the tribunal with you as your accusers, and to hell with you as your tormentors. —
2. Your souls while diseased, are most loathsome to God; for you are not only without the image and Spirit of God, but you are swarming with the vermin of sin and filthy lusts. —
3. You are slaves to the devil, drudging night and day at his work, grinding at his mill and feeding on his husks; he hath you in fetters, but you are insensible of it: Satan deals with you as the Philistines with Sampson, puts out your eyes that you may not see your chains. —
4. Your whole actions, natural, civil, and religious, are all an abomination to God. Not only your eating and drinking, buying and selling: but also your praying and communicating are abhorred, as being without faith in Jesus Christ. Besides the leprosy of sin which over-

spreads you, defiles all your best performances.——

5. Your disease is still the more dangerous, that you are not sensible of it; for while it is so, you are out of the way of healing, according to Matth. ix. 12. The whole see no need of the Physician. Awake therefore, O secure soul, consider thy case, and flee to the great Physician for help: until you see your misery you will not prize the remedy.

2dly, Consider tho' you be most miserable and distressed by sin, yet you have the balm of Gilead freely offered to you in the gospel, that can heal and save the most diseased soul, Isa. xlv. 22. *Look unto me, (saith Christ) and be ye saved.* And tho' ye have been stout-hearted against God, yet, saith he, *Hearken unto me, I bring near my righteousness to you,* Isa. xlvi. 12, 13. It is a pleasure to him to bring his balm near to you, and to see poor sinners willing to make use of it; for, saith he, Ezek. xviii. 32. *I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.* See also Ezek. xxxiii. 2.

3dly, Consider how long you have slighted this balm already; wherefore if you neglect it any longer, your day of grace may come to end, and your healing time go over; so that when you would be healed, the balm may be far from you. Wherefore improve your day like that people in Capernaum, Luke iv. 40. *Now when the sun was setting, all they who had any sick with divers diseases, brought them unto him, and he laid his hand on every one of them, and healed them.* Go you, O diseased souls, and do likewise. Many of you have delayed till the sun is at the setting, the sun of the gospel, the sun of your life, the sun of your health and strength. O then make haste before the sun set, to bring your sick souls to Christ to be cured: For *now is the accepted time,* 2 Cor. vi. 2. Now is your healing day. And if you should lose this day of your healing, to-morrow may be the day of your eternal wounding.

Quest. But what shall we do to attain to a sense and feeling of our wounds in order to healing?

Ans. Take this advice :

1. Be diligent in the use of all outward means: read the scriptures, and get the knowledge of your lost state in Adam, and the way of salvation thro' a surety's righteousness. Attend the preaching of the word, which is the usual mean of conversion: be not absent from the ordinary occasions of it, lest you miss that sermon that was most suitable to your case, and might have been the means of saving your souls. The devil is at pains to keep you from some sermons, for he may know what ministers are preparing before-hand, and when he sees any thing coming that is likely to touch you, he will contrive some temptation to keep you back from hearing it.

2. Study to affect your hearts with what you hear of your mortal disease, the sinful natures you brought into the world, their pollution, rebellion, and enmity against God. Think upon the many acts of rebellion you have broke out into against heaven. Think also how near you are, while unhealed, to everlasting burning, yea every moment on the brink of the fiery furnace, and kept out of it only by the thread of life, which may be broke by any bit of bread you eat, by slipping of a foot, by stumbling of a horse, and by hundreds of distempers, which like so many lighted candles, are ready to burn the thread, and let your diseased souls drop into the pit for ever.

3. When God shoots the arrow of conviction into the conscience, do not seek to shake it out till it reach the end for which it was sent. Be not like those who go to their callings to work it out, or to their cups to drink it out, or to their beds to sleep it out, or to their games to divert it out. But go you rather to your knees, and pray that the wound may be medicinal and saving, that it may be as deep as needful, and the power of the Lord may be present

to heal you. Apply to Jesus your Physician, that he may take out the arrow with his own hand, and bring the balm of Gilead to the wound.

4. Apply to the Holy Spirit, who is the author of saving convictions, and implore his gracious influences; for the dry bones stir not till he breathe upon them. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to apply Christ's purchase to you, and saving convictions are the first part of that purchase he makes you partake of. Plead then with him, " Lord come and do thine office, art thou not as willing to apply as Christ was to purchase? Is not the Spirit the applier as freely promised as Christ the Physician? Is not that a free promise, Ezek. xxxvi. *I will put my Spirit within you?* It depends upon no condition in us, only it is said, ver. 37. *I will be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.* And now, Lord, I am enquiring for it as I can, O do it for me."

II. I come next to address those diseased souls who are sensible and feeling, sick sinners, who are convinced of their distressed case by nature, and their need of the Physician; you who are the proper objects of his care, Matth. ix. 12, 13. and xviii. 11. Luke xviii. 13, 14. I exhort all such to come and employ Christ the only Physician of Israel to heal your wounded souls. Delay not; for your disease is mortal; your wound is deep; the sooner you come, the better. Lose not the season when Christ is dealing with you by his Spirit; but when the waters are stirred, see that you presently step in, that you may be made whole.

Quest. How shall we improve the season, so as to be cured of our disease?

Ans. Observe these directions:

1. As you ought to be concerned about your disease, see that your trouble and concern be of the right kind. Be grieved for it, not only because it brings ruin upon yourselves, but mainly because it unfits you for glorifying God, and enjoying communion with him.

Be troubled both for the general corruption of your natures, and for the particular plagues of your own hearts; point out those to your Physician which are most grievous to you, whether it be hardness, blindness, unbelief, backsliding, pride, earthly-mindedness, &c. Every man that would have access to God, must know the plague of his own heart, 1 Kings viii. 38. Christ would have every man point forth his ailment to him, with the blind man, Luke xviii. 41. *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?* Let your answer be ready like his, *Lord, that I may receive my sight.* Lord, that my unbelief may be removed, that my hardness may be cured, my backsliding healed, &c. Lay open all your sores, and hide nothing from your Physician.

2dly, Come to Christ with a firm belief and persuasion of his power and ability to heal you. This is the thing he demands of every sick soul, as of those two blind men that followed him crying for help, Matth. ix. 28. *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* Believe ye that I have all fulness in me to answer all your wants, to cure all your diseases, to suit all your cases! O for a strong faith in Christ's power! This doth greatly glorify him.

3dly, Plead importunately with your Physician for a cure: He allows you to do it, and to fill your mouths with arguments for that end.

1. Plead the sovereign efficacy of his blood, that it is a remedy of infinite virtue, and can heal the most desperate disease; say with the leper, Matth. viii. 2. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* As if he had said, Thou mayst do with me as thou wilt, but one thing I am sure of, thou canst heal me: So say you, Lord, I am sure thy blood can cure and cleanse me, tho' I were as vile with sin as the leper was with his disease, so that if I die in my sins, it will not be for want of virtue in Christ's blood, the balm of Gilead is all-sufficient. As the leper's argument prevailed with Christ to cure him, so a strong faith and persua-

sion of the virtue of Christ's blood will engage him to heal you.

2. Plead the freeness of his balm to all diseased souls, that the fountain of his blood runs freely to the worst of lepers, that he shuts out none from it, but invites all to come; that those who had the deepest wounds and most dangerous diseases, have come upon the invitation, and been made whole, as Manasseh, the woman of Samaria, Mary Magdalene, the penitent thief, Paul, the Corinthians, &c. Say, Lord, I come with the rest upon thy call, O do not shut me out.

3. Plead your inability to do any thing for your own healing as the impotent man did with Christ at the pool of Bethesda, John v. 6, 7. In like manner say, " Lord, I have been many years at the side of the pool, near the healing balm, but I am impotent and unable of myself to move one step towards it, far less to apply it: no man or angel can cure my lameness; Lord, if thou do not pity and help me, I must even die and perish within view of the balm."

4. Plead with Jesus Christ, that he alone is the only qualified person in heaven or earth to be your Physician. " Lord, thou hast infinite knowledge and skill to discern my disease with its symptoms and causes, and to prescribe the proper remedies. Thou hast infinite compassions to pity me, and infinite power to relieve me when I cry for help. Yea, thou hast human bowels and tenderness of heart also to sympathize with me in distress. Nay, thou hast a commission from heaven to heal such diseased souls as mine, which thou didst cheerfully accept. And thou hast come a long journey from heaven to earth to visit the sick, and proclaim thy commission to them. Thou hast assumed my nature, and taken a human body that it might be pierced to send forth a precious balm for my wounds; and hast graciously promised to apply this balm to all who come to thee, Hos. xiv. 1, 4. John vi. 37. Rev. xxii. 17. Yea,

“ thou hast come to those who never sought thee for
 “ healing, Isa. lxv. 1. Luke x. 33, 34. And shall not
 “ I get healing when I am earnestly seeking it.”

5. Plead the glory of his name and the credit of his blood, say, “ Lord, both these will suffer if a poor
 “ wounded creature, that relies upon the faith of thy
 “ word, and the virtue of thy blood should be disap-
 “ pointed and perish.” This was Moses’s argument with God for pity to the Israelites, Numb. xiv. 15, 16. *The nations will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land, which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.* So do you plead, “ Lord, what will the devils and atheists
 “ say?” Will they not blaspheme thy name, and reproach thy blood, and say, because thy power and blood were not able to heal these diseased souls, thou lettest them perish.

6. Plead the mercifulness of his nature, with David, Psal. xli. 4. *Lord, be merciful to me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.* Thou art a merciful as well as skilful Physician. O let not a poor sick soul that depends on the mercy of thy nature, and merit of thy blood for healing go away disappointed.

But poor sensible sinners have many objections against themselves.

Object. 1. I know (saith one) Christ is a great Physician, but I am not worthy that he should come under my roof to heal such a one as me.

Ans. 1. There was never one healed because of his worthiness, for it is only the unworthy that Christ came to heal and save, 1 Tim. i. 15. Rev. iii. 17, 18. Matth. ix. 12, 13. — 2. The more sensible a soul is of unworthiness, and humbled for it, the more welcome he is to that Physician, Psal. x. 17. Isa. lxvi. 2. Mat. v. 3. Luke xviii. 14. — 3. If you come not to be healed till you be worthy, you will never come, for where can a poor worthless sinner get any worthy or desirable qualification but from Christ only? You must

come to Christ for every thing that is valuable. —
4. Seeing Christ doth expressly call the most unworthy to come to him for healing, Rev. iii. 17, 18. 1 John iii. 23. this should encourage you to do it. It was his call that encouraged the blind man to come to him, Mark x. 47. *Be of good comfort, rise, he callith thee.* Christ's calls and commands should be obeyed by the unworthy as well as others.

Object II. But I fear (saith another) I am not within Christ's commission, and how then can I expect healing from him?

Ans. It is high presumption for any man to intrude into God's secret decrees, which no angel dare do: This suggestion then is not from God, but from the devil, to drive sinners into despair, or to keep them away from Christ: For the Spirit of Christ tells us, that *secret things belong unto God, and the things which are revealed belong unto us*, Deut. xxix. 29. Now seeing it is revealed to you that Christ was sent to save and heal the lost and sick, the bruised and broken-hearted, the halt and maimed, the wretched and miserable, the poor and blind, and calls such to come to him for healing, Mat. xviii. 11. Luke iv. 18. Luke xiv. 21. Rev. iii. 17, 18. And seeing you cannot but own that some of these characters belong to you; this should encourage you to come to Christ with expectation.

Object III. But my wounds are very deep, my disease is of a desperate nature.

Ans. All diseases are alike to Christ's blood: it can as easily cure the greatest as the smallest, 1 John i. 7. What disease more deadly than that of the three thousand who imbrued their hands in Christ's blood, Acts ii. and yet they were all healed by it.

Object IV. But I am sick of many diseases at once.

Ans. The balm of Christ's blood can as soon cure many diseases as one.

Object V. But my diseases are old and inveterate, and my sores have run many years.

Ans. Christ hath cured many such, the thief on the cross had an old festering disease, and so had Zaccheus, for he had wronged many, yet this mighty Physician cured them both. He cured many old distempers in mens bodies, to assure us of the virtue of his blood to cure old diseases in our souls. Therefore he cured the woman's issue of blood that had run twelve years. He loosed a woman that Satan had kept bound eighteen years. He cured the impotent man at Bethesda that had an infirmity thirty-eight years. All which is recorded for our encouragement to come to Christ with our old sores.

Object. VI. I have relapsed into the same disease, and can I expect healing?

Ans. Relapses indeed are most dangerous, yet Christ doth undertake to heal those who relapse, Hof. xiv. 2. and he actually healed Peter, tho' he relapsed into the same sin.

Object. VII. But I fear I have no right to Christ's blood.

Ans. Seeing all the ends of the earth are bid to look to it for healing, and Christ hath appointed his gospel to be preached, and his balm to be offered to every creature, you have a full and sufficient warrant to come and make use of it.

Object. VIII. But I have long slighted the offers of this balm.

Ans. The more hainous thy sin, or deep thy wound be, thou hast the greater need of this sovereign medicine: And go not to make thy wound deeper by a new refusal.

Object. IX. I have essayed to go and apply this balm, but find I have no strength to do it.

Ans. If you have sincere desires to accept and use it, you have some beginnings of faith, and therefore improve these desires by making frequent essays to receive Christ and apply his blood. Believing is a duty you should be oft essaying and aiming at, even before

you find God's Spirit effectually concurring: This you do in other duties; for tho' you cannot pray or praise, communicate, meditate, or sanctify the sabbath aright without the Spirit, yet you forbear not to aim at these duties, even when you find not the Spirit at work; and neither should you in this case. Tho' you have no power to believe savingly, yet still be aiming at it, and believe as you can. The Spirit will pity your weakness, when you are making honest attempts to do his will; therefore be aiming to approve the device of redeeming love, to part with your own righteousness, to say *Amen* to the well ordered covenant, to take a crucified Christ for your all, and venture your all in his hand. And tho' you often fail in your attempts, yet still try it again, and at length the Spirit will help you to stretch out faith's hand, and fasten it on Christ and his wounds to your comfort.

Object. X. But I am afraid Christ is not willing to apply his blood to heal me

Ans. What more evidences of willingness can you ask from Christ? You have both the word and writ of him that is faithful and true, and his oath also, John vi. 37 Ezek xxxiii. 11. And to all these he adds outward signs and seals which are visible to your bodily eyes in the sacraments, to assure you of his willingness. Also his frankness to heal all the bodies of men that came to him while on earth, is given you as a strong pledge of his willingness to cure your souls; for you can't imagine he would be more compassionate to men's bodies than to their souls, seeing it was his great errand to seek and heal souls, and to shed his blood for that end. May we all have faith in that blood for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

S E R M O N VIII.

Jerem. viii. 22. *Is there no Balm in Gilead, &c.*

I Thankfully admire the generous kindness and free love of your Phylician, in distinguishing you from the rest of the world. He hath done that for you which he hath not done for thousands, nay, for millions of your fellow-creatures, and even for many in those very families and congregations where you dwell. He hath healed your natures, when they were sick unto death: He hath pardoned your sins, when they were sinking under guilt. O bless and praise him with David, Psal ciii 1, 2, &c. Christ expects a tribute of praise from healed souls, and observes how they pay it, as in the case of the lepers, Luke xvii 18. *Were there not ten cleansed (saith he) but where are the nine?* There he counted their number, and found nine healed who returned him no thanks. And this he censures as base ingratitude to God.

2dly, Be earnest with God for thorough and perfect healing, that the disease of sin may be wholly subdued. Let the work of sanctification be still carried on; for this is a continued healing of your nature, till at last the cure be compleated at death.

3dly, Pity your relations and neighbours who are still sick unto death, and do what you can for their cure. Especially pity and pray for your children who are sick of the plague you conveyed to them. Recommend to them the Balm of Gilead, and the Physician there. Tell them your experience of the Physician's skill and tenderness, and the virtue of his Balm.

—“O come and see, He hath cured me of a deep wound, an old disease of a hard heart, of dreadful atheism, unbelief, blindness, earthliness, pride, passion, &c.”

4thly, Take proper means to preserve health when restored; such as, 1. Live in a good and wholesome air, *that is*, in the society of God's people. 2. Keep good hours, and a wholesome diet, *that is*, stated times every day for the soul's refreshment, by reading, meditation and prayer. 3. Use proper exercises, such as the exercise of faith, prayer, hearing, communicating and Christian converse; for spiritual sloth and idleness greatly prejudice the soul's health.

5thly, Beware of whatever may occasion a relapse into your disease, such as the temptations and snares which Satan will lay in your way to draw you into sin: Carefully avoid them, and pray for strength against them. And particularly beware of unnecessary going into infected company, lest you catch the disease from them, for sin is most contagious.

6thly, Let all those be the objects of your special love, who have got their natures healed, and the image of God restored to them. Love them, tho' they be poor and low in the world, and even tho' they differ in several things from you: for if you love them only who are of your way of thinking in all things, that is liker a sectarian, or party love, than a

true Christian love. For it would say, you love saints more for their likeness to you, than for their likeness and relation to Christ. Now the true motive of Christian love is a man-likeness and love to Christ more than to you. And surely, all these being members of the same body, and children of the same family, who will spend a whole eternity together in admiring and praising the Lamb, should love one another while sojourning in the wilderness below. Christ gives this as a mark of his disciples, and those who are healed by him.

7thly, Rejoice and bless God, when you hear of many sick souls flocking to the Balm of Gilead and the Physician there, and when there are hopeful signs of their healing and recovery. Look upon these as the most refreshing news that can be brought to your ears.

8thly, Learn patience under the distress of your bodies, seeing you have got healing to your souls. Do not murmur at it, seeing God sees it needful for your soul's health.

Lastly, Be concerned for the diseased land wherein you live. If you have got healing to yourselves, you ought to have public spirits to be affected with the case of a sick land and church, especially at a time, when it may be said of her, as of Judah, *Isaiah i. 5, 6. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint: from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.* So alas, it may be said of our land, The whole body politic and ecclesiastic is sadly diseased, our kings and princes, nobility, gentry, magistrates, ministers, burgesses, commons, and all ranks are full of wounds and sores.

Quest. How is it we are to shew our concern for the land in such distress?

Ans. Two ways, 1. By earnest prayer for it.
2. By using the means in our power to heal it.

I. Spread out the case of the land in prayer before the great Physician of Israel, and plead that he may look on it with an eye of compassion; yea, humbly expostulate with God about the church's case, like Jeremiah, Jer. xiv. 9. *Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us?* Alas, no Physician nor Balm on earth can heal us; no ordinance, sermons, nor sacraments can cure us. All the warnings, reproofs, and judgments in the world cannot heal our wounds. O, if Israel's Physician would come and do it himself! The Lord hath justly smitten us for our sins, and is threatening to smite us more. Now what can we do in that case but look to him for pity, and plead that the Land which hath smitten us, may also heal us; for nothing will heal us till he come with the Balm of Gilead, his Blood and Spirit, to our wounds. This Balm can heal nations and churches, as well as single persons. O then look earnestly to that Blood that quencheth the fire of wrath for us, and purchaseth every thing that is good to us, and plead for the sake of that Blood, that God would revive his work in the land, breathe upon the dry bones and make a stir amongst them, pour out a spirit of conversion and of reformation upon men of all stations, magistrates, ministers, elders, parents, and teachers of youth, as well as the young generation, that they may turn to the Lord, and exert themselves for bearing down vice, and promoting Christian knowledge and piety in the land. Let all cry to God to rebuke the winds of error and division, that truth may triumph, and breaches may be healed; that ministers and people may have one heart and one mind, to *serve the Lord with one consent*. And thus would the health of the church and nation be recovered. I might adduce many motives to press you to plead for repentance and healing to the whole land; I shall mention a few.

1. This has been the commendable practice of God's people in all ages, as of Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, &c. as in Exod. xxxii. 11, 12. Psal. li. 18. Isa. lxii. 1. Jer. ix. 1. Dan. ix. 17. And this is what the Lord requires of every one, Psal. cxxii. 6. Joel ii. 17.

2. Prayers put up for a sick church or nation are most agreeable to God, and have a sort of commanding power with him, Isa. xlv. 2. He puts great honour upon such prayers, and makes them means of producing marvellous effects and deliverances, as in Exod. xvii. 11, 13. and xxxii. 14. And we read of the Lord's seeking out such wrestlers that he may honour them, Ezek. xxii. 30. *And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it.* These are the men that GOD delights to honour.

3. The consideration of the hand you have had, by your sins, in bringing on diseases upon the church and land, should excite you to wrestle and plead for healing to her. The laws of common humanity should even oblige you to this duty.

4. They who pray most for Zion in her distressed and wounded case, shall be the largest sharers in her comforts when God brings healing to her. These shall reap most plentifully of her joys when the harvest comes, who now sow most of the seed of tears for her in her trouble.

II. In the 2^d place, I said every one should use all the means in their power for healing the church and land. GOD has appointed men in different stations and capacities, to be as under-physicians to bring a kind of balm to a diseased land, such as magistrates, ministers, elders, &c. These by wholesome laws, instructions, and examples may contribute very much, thro' the divine blessing, to the healing of our disease. Nay, private Christians who are in the meanest stations, if they do what is incumbent upon them, may

have some share in this blessed work of healing a sick land. As sometimes we have heard of great cures, effectuated by mean and obscure persons, when learned physicians hath given over the case as desperate; so private Christians may be instrumental in bringing about our cure, when those of greater power and skill look on our case as hopeles. They may be of great use to recommend religion to the world, by conforming their practice to its rules, and adorning their profession with shining holiness and Christian virtues, and also by avoiding all dishonesty and injustice, pride and passion, malice and revenge, bitterness and evil-speaking, and every thing that may beget prejudice in the carnal world against Christianity, who are too ready to impute the faults of its professors to the religion itself. Private Christians also may bring their healing prayers and tears, and pour them out before the Lord in behalf of the diseased land. They may act faith on the blood of Christ, our sovereign Balm, and plead it with God, "LORD, was not this blood shed for the wounds of the church, as well as of particular believers? Is it not by CHRIST'S stripes the church must be healed, as well as every individual member? LORD, thou hast a tender sympathy with every member in distress, and wilt thou not much more regard the whole body! LORD, she whom thou lovest is sick, and nothing can save her life but the Balm of Gilead: This, thou alone hast, and none else can apply it. Make haste unto her, O GOD of Zion, Thou art her help and deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying; let thy power be present to heal her." Thus we see men of all ranks may be useful as under-physicians for healing a sick land.

Object. But, say some, the case of the church and land seems desperate, and her wounds incurable, and what then can be done by us for her?

Ans. However dangerous her case may be, yet it is not quite so desperate, as to make us give over all hopes and endeavours. I shewed before what grounds

of hope we have yet left us. And tho' the case were more desperate than it is, we ought still to be in the use of appointed means, and never distrust God in any strait whatsoever. We ought always to look to him, who is *wise in heart, and mighty in strength*, Job ix. 4. And remember the LORD's question to Abraham in a desperate case, Gen. xviii. 14. *Is any thing too hard for the Lord?* Unbelief stumbleth at GOD's power, when it seeth no visible means or instruments for bringing events about, not considering how easy it is for GOD, when he doth not find means, to create them; and when he pleaseth, even to work without them. It is the property of true faith not to make haste, or prescribe to GOD as to means or times of working, but to wait his leisure, and depend upon him in the greatest extremities.

It puts honour upon GOD, to trust him when our case seems most hopeless, and even to make the desperateness of our case an argument in prayer to GOD, and a ground for faith to fasten upon, so as to plead with him the more earnestly and confidently for help, and to say, "LORD, it will be the more for thy honour and glory, to undertake the cure of our disease, when matters are come to this extremity, that all besides are giving over our case as hopeless and desperate." The news of the Balm of Gilead, and the Physician there, should strengthen our faith, and support our hopes under the most deadly disease, and make us lift up our head, and look out for him. As old Jacob when he was just a dying, yet at the news of his son Joseph's being near, he strengthened himself and sat up on his bed expecting him; so should we, when ready to faint on the bed of our languishing case, endeavour to lift up our hearts at the good news of the Balm and Physician of Israel, and say, Is not JESUS CHRIST the great Physician commissioned by the FATHER to heal a poor wounded church and land! This is the time of her need and great strait, and a

proper season for him to step in for help. Both in scripture and experience we find the time of the church's extremity is GOD's usual opportunity of working and appearing for her, as in the case of Isaac when at the point of being sacrificed, and also in the case of the Jews when ready to be cut off by Haman's bloody plot. When there was but a hair's breadth betwixt them and destruction, GOD stepped in and saved them. It is in the mount that the LORD will be seen, so the text may be rendered, Gen xxii. 14.

Quest. Why doth GOD let the distress of his church and people come to such extremity, before he interpose for them?

Ans. He doth it for glorious and wise ends: 1. To glorify his wisdom in finding out a remedy when we can see no appearance of it. The Physician's skill is best discovered in mastering a distemper when it is become most inveterate and hopeless.

2. To shew his pity and compassion to his people, when their condition is most destitute. David depended upon GOD's pity in such a case Psal. xxvii. 10. *When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.* So when enemies think God hath forgotten his church, and men have cast her off, and they begin to scoff at Zion, and call her an outcast, then GOD seeth meet to shew his pity, to take her under his care and heal her wounds, Jer. xxx. 16, 17.

3. To excite the spirit of prayer in his people. It was for that end the LORD suffered his people to be brought to great extremity at the Red-sea, Exod. xiv 10 *The children of Israel lift up their eyes, and behold the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid, and cried unto the Lord.* When they were in great distress they cried to the Lord, but not before. So Christ slept in the ship, and let the tempest rise to a great height, to bring his disciples to their knees, Matth. viii. 24, 25. *They came and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish.* At such a time their prayers

are doubled, and most fervent, as in Psal. cxxiii. 3. *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.* And it is to be observed when such a spirit of fervent prayer is poured out upon the church, it is a sure presage of her adversaries ruin; so we see it was in Zech. xii. 9, 10. *I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem: And I will pour upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace, and of supplications.* If this spirit were poured out upon the inhabitants of Scotland, it would be a good presage of the Lord's appearing for her.

4. GOD puts off to extremity, to draw out his people's faith and dependance wholly upon himself. He cuts off the branches of earthly supports to make them clasp to the body of the tree, even to Him who is the everlasting GOD; and to bring them to reflect upon what he hath done for them in former extremities, and to act faith upon his power and pity, which he exerted for them in days of old. Thus did Jehosaphat in his great strait, 2 Chron. xx 7, 12. *Art thou not our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people? We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.* GOD would have the deliverances he hath given us in former straits, to draw out our faith upon him in new trials; and hence he says to Israel, when under fears of the Canaanites, Deut. vii 18 *Thou shalt not be afraid of them, but shall well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh and all Egypt:*

5. To humble his people and bring down the pride of their hearts. GOD brought his people to great extremities in the wilderness, and his great design therein was to humble them, as he tells them, Deut. viii. 2. *There is a woful root of pride in men's hearts that must be broken and subdued, before they can be meet for Heaven.* This root is oft breaking out in

discontent, murmuring, quarrelling, bitterness, passion and backwardness to submit to GOD's will. Now it costs much labour and pains to bring down such proud hearts to the will of GOD; they must even be reduced to great extremities, before they be sufficiently humbled, and brought calmly to submit, without any rising of heart against GOD. Hence it is said, Psal. cvii. 12. *He brought down their heart with labour.* And indeed it is a happy presage and fore-runner of GOD's gracious appearing for his people, when the proud swellings of their hearts are quelled, and they are brought to a silent submission under his hand, Psal. lvi. 10. *Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the heathen, &c.*

6. To take his people off from all creature confidences and lying refuges, which they are prone to look to in straits and difficulties: Great extremities drive men from trusting in the arm of flesh, and cause them to flee to the arm of JEHOVAH with whom is everlasting strength: In such cases they are made to cry, as in Psal. lx: 11: *O God, give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.* Then it is we are best qualified to receive help from God, when we are brought to own the insufficiency of creatures to relieve us and supply our needs. The man that had the lunatic child in sad distress, was in a fair way of getting a cure to him from CHRIST, when he came to be humbled by his disappointments, to have his eyes turned away from all human help, and was glad to apply to CHRIST as his last refuge, Matth. xvii. 14, 15, &c. There we see he came and humbly kneeled down before him, saying, *Lord have mercy upon my son, for he is lunatic and sore vexed, etc. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.* As if he had said, LORD, the case is desperate and incurable as to human help, and therefore I must look to thee alone for a cure; I have now none else to go to but thyself. Well then, said our Lord, since that is the case with

thee, *Bring him hither to me*, ver. 17. and he presently cured him. O that every one would bring their desperate diseases, in like manner, straight to Christ, with hearts humbled by disappointments, weaned from creature confidences and depending on Christ as their only Physician, and all-sufficient help. Were we once brought to this frame, Christ would in mercy step in and say, *Bring the disease hither to me*. It is surely owing to our not coming off from ourselves, and from all creature-help, and to our not bringing our cases to Christ immediately, that our diseases are so long continued.

From all which the wisdom of God doth manifestly appear in letting his church and people be brought to great extremities before he interpose for their help and relief. But seeing these extremities are CHRIST's opportunities for manifesting forth his glory, we ought not to despair in the darkest case, but always to *look to, and wait upon him that hideth himself from the house of Jacob*. Nay, we should do it, even then when we see every man with his hands on his loins in the utmost anguish and agony, as women in travail, like those in Jer. xxx. 6, 7. where we see a most surprising instance of GOD's mercy to Jacob, even then when his trouble comes to that extremity, that nothing in the world could match it; he pities him, and subjoins that merciful word, *But he shall be saved out of it*.

And it should encourage us the more to look to and wait upon GOD in this dark day, when we hear of his mercy and goodness in pitying other nations and countries when in melancholy circumstances, by granting a down-pouring of his Spirit on them for reviving his decayed work, and for convincing and converting multitudes of perishing souls by the preaching of the gospel; making them cry, *What shall we do to be saved?* and giving them no rest till they close with CHRIST their Surety, and become new creatures. And it is to be remarked that GOD hath been graciously pleased

to begin this work in New-England, and other parts of America, at a time when they abounded with complaints of darkness and deadness, decay of religion, backsliding, woful errors and divisions, as it is in Scotland at this day, These late surprizing and well-attested instances of GOD's mercy and sovereign grace, do shew us how easy it is for GOD to bring his Balm to a diseased land, when in the most hopeles case; and to qualify and raise up instruments to preach his gospel with such energy and power, as to rouse multitudes of secure souls, and make them *fly to Christ in clouds, and like flocks of doves to their windows*. He can take away the *sins of a land in one day, and make a nation to be born at once*. He can *shew wonders to the dead, and make the dead arise and praise him*. So that none should distrust him in the most desperate condition.

Well then, seeing Christ is a Physician so full of power, and also full of compassion, whence is it that our diseased land is unhealed, and multitudes are daily dying of their wounds? Surely the blame is not to be laid upon CHRIST, but upon ourselves, and our unwillingness to come to him. Ah! we chuse death, rather than healing from CHRIST. He may take up that complaint against us, as he did against the Jews in the days of his flesh, *Ye will not come to me that ye might get healing, and live: How oft would I have gathered you to be healed, but ye would not?* And thus he complained of their fathers also, Psal. lxxxi. *My people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would have none of me!* Oh! my dear friends, are you to follow their cursed example, to reject your healer? or what are you resolving to do? What think ye of Christ the Physician? Do you believe our report of him, or no? The people of other nations are giving ear, and believing our report of him, and flocking to him to be healed, and why do you sit still? Are they yielding and submitting to CHRIST as their Saviour and Lord?

Are they putting the crown on his head, and doing him honour? Why then should ye be the last to bring back the King to his house? Will ye be the last that will do him honour as a King, or give him employment as a Physician? Have ye not as much need of him, and as many wounds and diseases as others? O come then also, take the gospel Balm, and glorify the Physician of Israel. *Amen.*

The Glory of the Ministration of the Spirit

S E R M O N IX.

O N

2 COR. iii. 8. *How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?*

IN this chapter the apostle runs a comparison between the Old Testament and the new, the law of Moses and the gospel of CHRIST, and shews the excellency of the latter above the former. He calls the Old Testament dispensation, or law of Moses, the *ministration of death and condemnation*; because it discovered sin and denounced curses against it, and the law was given with thunder, lightning and much terror. Yet at the same time (he says) this dispensation was in some respects glorious, ver. 7. Why? It was glorious in the minister of it, Moses, who had a shining glory in his face when he brought the tables down from the mount. Glorious in regard of the glorious manifestation of GOD at the giving of the law: Glorious in respect of the gospel discoveries which were made by the types and sacrifices of the Old Testament. But then the apostle shews that the gospel-dispensation did far excel it in glory, and on

that account calls it the ministration of life, because it pointed out the way to life and salvation in a plainer manner: And the ministration of righteousness, because it discovered a perfect righteousness for sinners to rest upon. Also he calls it in the text the *ministration of the Spirit*, because of the great effusion of the Spirit that attended the gospel dispensation, especially in the first ages. The holy Spirit did then remarkably *bear testimony to the word of his grace*, by his inward operations upon the hearers of it. And this was it that made the ministration of the gospel far more glorious than that of the law; for under the law, there was but little of the Spirit let out for the conversion of souls, in respect of what was given under the gospel. The out-letting of the Spirit in such an abundant manner, made the gospel dispensation far more glorious than that of the legal: which gives ground for the following observation.

Doctrine. The effusion of the Spirit with a preached gospel makes a very glorious dispensation. Which I shall handle in the following method.

I. Premise some things concerning the nature and office of the Holy Spirit.

II. Shew when the gospel may be said to be a ministration of the Spirit to the hearers of it.

III. That there are some remarkable seasons when a preached gospel may be called the ministration of the Spirit in an eminent way.

IV. Enquire in what respects the ministration of the Spirit is a glorious dispensation.

V. Make application.

I. The first thing proposed is, to premise some things concerning the nature and office of the Holy Spirit. And, *1st*, The word Spirit, in the Hebrew

Ruach, in the Greek *Pneuma*, signifies wind, air, or breathing. It is sometimes used to point forth the nature and essence of GOD abstractly, as in John iv. 24. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* But most commonly it doth signify, as in the text, the third person of the holy Trinity. And sometimes he is called the Spirit of the Father, and sometimes the Spirit of the Son, which shews their oneness, and that he proceeds from both.

2dly, Our Lord Jesus Christ, by his undertaking in the covenant of redemption, and his sacrifice on the cross, obtained the ministration of the Holy Spirit to an elect world. This great gift and blessing which is of inestimable value, is our dear LORD's purchase and legacy to his people, which he designed for to supply his bodily absence from them when he went to heaven, John xvi. 7, 8. *If I depart I will send him unto you; and when he is come, he will reprove, etc.* The Spirit being Christ's legacy and donation, should much endear the gift to us. Some would rejoice to possess a relique or any thing that belonged to our Saviour in the days of his flesh. The Papists boast of some bits of the tree whereon he suffered, tho' Christ left no such things for our use or devotion: But here is a precious relique and legacy, which Christ in love to his people left them when going away, even his Holy Spirit, as his resident, to abide with them for ever.

3dly, The church under the Old Testament had a certain measure of the Spirit given her upon Christ's account. But the great effusion of the Spirit was reserved to the New Testament times, and given after Christ's ascension, according to his blessed compact with the Father, Acts ii. 33. This promise of the Holy Ghost is called *the promise*, by way of eminency, as including all the rest. And this effusion was frequently foretold as the great privilege of gospel times, Isa. xxxv. 6, 7. and xlv. 3. Ezek. xi. 9. and xxxvi. 27. Joel ii. 28, 29. So that let men reproach the Holy

Spirit with his influences and operations as they will, he was prophesied of and expected of old, as the great blessing under the gospel: And men's despising Him now as they do, is but a fulfilling of Christ's word, John xiv. 17. *Yet the world cannot receive Him, because it neither seeth nor knoweth Him.* That is, they have no experience of his work in them. But for us not to own and avow the Spirit of God in His work and operations, is in effect to be ashamed of Christ's precious promise and legacy which he left us, and to be guilty of the basest ingratitude to our dear Redeemer.

4thly, The great office of the Holy Spirit in elect souls is to be the applier of Christ's purchase to them, which he doth by teaching them and guiding them into all truth, John xiv. 26. and xvi. 13. By convincing and reproving them of sin, John xvi. 7. By renewing and sanctifying their souls, Titus iii. 5. 1 Pet. i. 2. By mortifying and subduing sin in them, Rom. viii. 13. By helping their infirmities in prayer, and interceding for them, Rom. viii. 26. By comforting them and witnessing to their adoption, John xiv. 16. Rom. viii. 16. Wherefore seeing the Holy Ghost is the applier of Christ's purchase, and is promised by Christ to supply his absence to us, he ought to be received and valued as the great blessing of the gospel-church.

5thly, Christ hath taught us to make the giving of His Holy Spirit the chief petition and principal blessing we should ask of God, Luke xi. 9, 10. and ii. 12, 13. There he enjoins us to be importunate for his blessing, to ask, to seek, to knock; and for our encouragement he promises, ver. 13. *that our heavenly Father shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So the apostle Paul prays for the inward operations of the Spirit to the Ephesians, as the greatest blessing he can seek for them. Eph. iii. 16. For it is he that works faith, love, joy, peace, meekness and all other graces in us, Gal. v. 22.

II. The second thing in the method, is to shew when the gospel may be said to be the ministration of the Spirit to the hearers of it. And it is so when the Holy Spirit doth concur with the preaching of the word, for making saving impressions upon mens hearts and consciences, and gracious changes in their lives and conversations. — As for instance,

1. When he is pleased to make close and particular application of the reproofs and threatnings of the word, to the sinner's conscience, saying as Nathan to David, *Thou art the man*, thou art the guilty sinner that is threatned, cursed and condemned by the law. Thy life is unholy, thy nature is polluted, thy heart is full of plagues; yea, thy soul is black with sin and hateful in the sight of a holy GOD! And what wilt thou do to be saved?

2^{dly}, When the arrows of conviction are so fastned in the conscience, that the man cannot shake them out; he hath got such discoveries of sin's evil and the soul's danger, that his mind cannot be easy: No earthly comfort or enjoyment can satisfy him while he is within the flood-mark of wrath. He becomes anxious and inquisitive after the way of salvation, as those, Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30. His questions are not, What shall I do for health to a sickly body! Or for bread to a pinched family? But what shall I do to be saved from the wrath that is to come?

3^{dly}, The gospel is the ministration of the Spirit to the hearers, when they are brought to despair of help and deliverance by any course or contrivance of their own; and are driven from all other refuges besides Christ. When they are made to see, that no ordinance, no duties nor performances, no frames, no righteousness nor attainments of their own; can skreen from wrath, nor yield any rest to the sole of their foot. When they are convinced they are in a shipwreckt perishing state in the first Adam, and that they have no other plank of salvation to trust to but

Jesus Christ the second Adam. When they see themselves sinking upon the broken bottom of the old covenant, and that there is no way to be saved but to leap from it to the rock of salvation Christ, and only to trust to and hang by the clefts of that rock.

4thly, The Spirit concurs, when the flinty rock is turned into a water pool, as in Psal. cxiv. 8. that is, when the hard heart is softened and melted down into streams of penitential tears for sin both original and actual, and particularly for wounding and piercing of Christ by sin, and for long slighting him and keeping him at the door of the heart: and when the soul is brought to be deeply humbled for mispent time, misimproved sabbaths, offers of grace, days of health and precious opportunities of salvation.

5thly, The gospel is the ministration of the Spirit, when thereby light doth shine into the understanding, discovering the excellency of the Remedy provided for lost sinners, the ability and fulness of Christ, the sufficiency of his righteousness, and the suitableness of his offices and covenant for all our wants and miseries. And when the soul's desires are excited after Christ and salvation thro' him, and made to cry, *O that I knew where to find him! O saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* And when the soul is brought to strong purposes and resolutions to venture to Christ and cast itself at his feet, saying, *I will go into the King, if I perish, I perish.*

6thly, When convinced sinners are determined to fall in with the gospel device of salvation thro' Christ, heartily to approve of it, renounce their own righteousness for a surety's righteousness, accept of Christ in all his offices, and surrender themselves unto the Lord. And when they are brought to hate sin as the enemy and murderer of Christ, and to be willing to cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye for Christ, and to say with Ephraim, *What have I to do any more with idols?* and with David, *Depart from*

me, ye evil-doers, I will keep the commandments of my God.

7thly, The gospel is the ministration of the Spirit, when the hearts of hearers are loosed from the world and carnal things, and brought to some measure of spirituality and fixedness in God's service, and to find more delight and satisfaction therein, than in all temporal enjoyments, and to say, *A day in God's courts is better to us than a thousand elsewhere. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.*

8thly, When they find life and vigour put in all their graces, their faith strengthened, and their love warmed to Christ above all things; the wind blows on their gardens, and the spices flow out. They have sensible liberty and loosing of bonds in their approaches to God; their clogs and straitnings are removed, and they are raised above their ordinary frame in prayer. Their hearts indite good matter, their tongue is like the pen of a ready-writer concerning the King: Their own hearts melt into tears of love and affection to Christ, and their words reach others about them with a pleasant perfume, and warm their hearts too.

9thly, When gospel hearers do find the ordinances blessed means of communion and intercourse with God, so that they get sweet discoveries of the beauty of Christ and holiness, they are enabled to plead and feed upon the promises; they have peace and joy in believing, their doubts are removed, and they approach to the assurance of God's favour, of pardon of sin, and future glory: They breathe after a full conformity to Christ, and his image, that holiness may be perfected in them, and the cope-stone put upon the work of grace. That they may have no more complaints of indwelling sin, and imperfect services. And under a sense of God's love in CHRIST, they endeavour to walk tenderly and circumspectly, to make their light shine before men, and to glorify God upon the earth. Then it is, and in the other cases above mentioned,

that the gospel may be said to be the ministration of the Spirit to the hearers of it. And surely such a concurrence and effusion of the Spirit with the preached word, would make it a very glorious dispensation. O to see such remarkable seasons of grace !

III. The third Head proposed, was to mention some of those seasons when the preaching of the gospel hath in an eminent way been the ministration of the Spirit. Of which take these instances :

1st, In the apostles times, after Christ's ascension, there was a wonderful effusion of the Spirit with the gospel for the first planting of Christianity in the world, according to Christ's promise, Luke xxiv. 49. Acts i. 8. Then the gospel was a glorious ministration of the Spirit, when poor illiterate men were helped to preach with such powerful convincing energy, that their words pierced the consciences, and changed the minds and lives of thousands of their hearers at once. And tho' their doctrine was levelled against the pride and corruption of mens hearts, and tended to abolish the Pagan idolatry, as well as the Jewish sacrifices and ceremonies : and tho' it was derided by the learned men of that age, and opposed by the civil powers with the greatest violence ; yet under all these disadvantages it spread with amazing success, so that in 20 or 30 years time, and before the apostles died, the gospel made its way thro' Judea, Syria, Greece, Asia, Egypt, Europe and the whole vast Roman empire ; so that every province in it had plenty of its professors. It was the Holy Spirit that directed the arrows of the word into the consciences of men, with clear and convincing evidence of the truth thereof, and confirmed them so in the belief of it, that no trial nor temptation could shake them. It was the effusion of the Spirit with the gospel that gave the apostles and first preachers such extraordinary resolution, courage, and hardness to encounter all difficulties, to bear up under the

greatest miseries of life, and joyfully to sacrifice their all for Christ, and seal their doctrine with their blood.

2dly, The gospel was a glorious ministration of the Spirit at our reformation from Popery above 200 years ago, whereby our reformers were assisted and carried through the greatest difficulties and opposition as in the apostles days. It was a small mean that God made the rise of his great work, to wit, Luther's appearing against Texellius for preaching up and selling his indulgencies. Yet from this spark such a fire kindled, that set all Europe in a flame, and enlightened many nations, that were covered with the thick darkness of idolatry and superstitions, in the knowledge of the truth. Such was the out-pouring and efficacy of the Spirit at that time, that the gospel made a swift progress in a short space by very mean instrument. The preachers employed were none of those who were famed in the world in that age for learning, honour, power or greatness, but men that had lived in obscurity, and were loaded with reproach by their adversaries; such as Luther, Zuinglius, Melancthon, Bucer, Calvin, nox, Wishart, etc. yet these mean men went forth to confront those powers, which then made the earth to tremble, to wit, the Pope and his conclave (whose power was then most formidable) with the emperor of Germany, and the rest of the kings of Europe who then gave their power to the beast. These instruments had no outward encouragement at first, none to support them, but all the world seemed to combine against them; yet in spite of all opposition the light of reformation brake up more and more; the gospel was preached with such power, that it prevailed against all the powers of the earth, and spread from city to city, so that in a few years many cities, states and countries became subject to the truth, and that notwithstanding the bloody sword and flames of martyrdom which raged against those who owned it. O what a ministration of the Spirit did at that time

attend Mr George Wilhart when he preached in this town of Dundee, and through Angus, Lothian, and several places of the West of Scotland! how wonderfully were the spirits of men then raised and affected with the Word of God!

3dly, In the church of Scotland, not only at her reformation from Popery, but also frequently since, there have been solemn times of the out-pouring of the Spirit upon the land, and several places thereof, as in the year 1596, when the General Assembly renewed the national covenant in the little kirk at Edinburgh, and Synods and Presbyteries did the same after their example. Calderwood tells us how this practice was countenanced by God's Spirit, and attended with a general melting of heart and many tears.—About the year 1625, in the west of Scotland, where the persecution from Prelates and their agents was hottest for non-pliance with Perth Articles, &c. God was pleased to countenance and support them with an extraordinary out-letting of his Spirit. This began in the parish of Stewarton, and hence was called by the profane of that time, the Stewarton sickness, but afterwards it spread thro' that country, and was very remarkable at Irvine under the ministry of Mr David Dickson, which was accompanied with many convincing proofs of God's power, and many conversions.—We have a famous instance of that power in the solemn Communion that was at the Kirk of Shots, 20th June, 1630, when there was an extraordinary down-pouring of the Spirit attending the work, and especially the sermon on the Monday, 21st of June, by Mr John Livingstone, that made a great and unusual motion among the hearers, (who were there convened in great numbers of divers ranks;) so that near 500 had a discernible change wrought upon them, and most of them proved lively Christians afterwards. — Again, in the year 1638, God gave a general effusion of the Spirit, which roused up all

ranks from their secure backslidden state, and made them agree to renew the national covenant. Then the spirits of men were greatly raised and wrought upon by the word, the ordinances were lively and longed after, both personal and national reformation were seriously set about. And this for several years was followed with a large harvest of souls brought in to Christ; many thousands flocked to him, like doves to their windows. — Likewise in the late persecuting times under K. Charles II. there were many gracious effusions with the preaching of the gospel in the fields. Also at and after the late happy revolution, the gospel was remarkably the ministration of the Spirit in many places of Scotland. Now surely, when we consider the days of old, and the years of ancient times, we should excite ourselves to thankfulness for mercies past, and set our hope in God for mercies future; and likewise humble ourselves deeply before the Lord for those sins which have long made our heavens as brass, and withheld those blessed showers which were wont to fall upon our land.

4thly, We have very late and well-attested accounts of glorious effusions of the Spirit in several parts of America, and particularly New-England; and some of them I have seen dated within these few months, bearing, "That their land which was formerly dry and parched, is now like a watered garden; that Christ is riding in triumph by a preached gospel, and the inhabitants by thousands are submitting to him; that converts are numerous like the drops of dew from the womb of the morning. Yea, (say some letters) the work is so unexpressibly glorious, that it is impossible by words, to make one who is not an eye-witness have just conceptions thereof." The Reverend Messrs. Edward, Whitefield, and Tennent have been honoured to have been very instrumental by their labours under God to give a beginning to this blessed work, which I hope will con-

tinuc and spread to the praise and glory of free grace. And seeing God sent one of these instruments lately to Scotland, may his labours in it be followed with the same blessed effects. These showers of the Spirit which are falling just now on several places do encourage many to hope they are forerunners of God's giving a general revival to his work, and of his bringing about the glory of the latter days, which he hath promised to his church, when he will make his gospel every-where a glorious ministration of the Spirit. Let us all cry for it, and for poor Scotland, that it may not be past by when other places are watered. May the Lord bless his word. *Amen.*

In what Respects this Ministration is glorious.

S E R M O N X.

O N

2 COR. iii. 8.

How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?

IV. **I**N the method I laid down for handling this subject, the 4th Head was, To shew in what respect the ministration of the Spirit is a glorious dispensation. By the ministration of the Spirit, we are to understand his gracious influences upon the hearers of the gospel, or his special operations and workings in their souls, together with the word, for their conversion and salvation. Now these are glorious in several respects.

1st, They come from a glorious Author, namely the Holy Ghost, the third person of the glorious Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, and who with them is the only true God, being the same in nature and essence, and equal in power and glory.

2^{dly}, They cost a *glorious price*. However the influences and operations of the Spirit be slighted and reproached by men, they are the dear purchase of our glorious Redeemer's blood.

3^{dly}, They are promised and bestowed to supply the room and absence of a *glorious Person*: even the room of our Emmanuel, while the heavens do receive him, and keep him from his people's view.

4^{thly}, The ministration of the Spirit is glorious, in regard it is granted to believers as the earnest and pledge of a *glorious inheritance*, Eph. i. 13, 14. And also for qualifying and making them meet to dwell in the same for ever.

5^{thly}, In regard it is necessary to display to us the glory and excellency of the Person and Offices of Christ, and his infinite fulness: And also doth open our eyes to discern all the glorious perfections of God in him.

6^{thly}, The Spirit's ministration gives a *glorious lustre* to the souls of believers, and makes them shine with true beauty and splendor. Hence the King's daughter is said to be *all-glorious within, and their beauty to be as the olive-tree, &c.*

7^{thly}, The ministration of the Spirit with a preached gospel makes a glorious dispensation: chiefly upon the account of the *glorious and surprizing changes* which it makes upon the hearts and lives of men at their conversion. How marvellous were these changes, upon the first pouring out of the Spirit after our Lord's ascension! Those first fruits of his purchase and promise were indeed very glorious. Then the ministration of the Spirit like a mighty current did

carry all before it, and conquered thousands at one sermon, yea, it made the most obstinate and inveterate enemies to stoop before the word, tho' preached by poor despised men. This made the world to wonder as if some universal enchantment had fallen upon men, and the more they sought to suppress and bear it down, the more it increased and spread. It made the rich chuse poverty, the sensual quit their pleasures, those who dwelt in fine houses to betake themselves with chearfulness to dens and caves of the earth; yea, and sometimes those who were violent persecutors of Christians one day, become joyful martyrs with them the next. But not only at that time, but many times since, the ministration of the Spirit with the gospel hath produced wonderful changes on its hearers.

As 1. When thereby the dead in sins and trespasses have been raised from the grave of corruption, and made alive to God: Those who were profane and vicious have changed the whole course of their lives, and turned as remarkable for good as before they were for ill. The leopard hath changed his spots, and the Ethiopian his colour, and such who were accustomed to do evil, have learned to do well. And all this change hath been occasioned by the foolishness of preaching, and sometimes by one word in a plain gospel-sermon; which could not be brought about by twenty years moral discourses, and the most sublime strains of human eloquence. And sometimes weak gifts have been owned and blest, when the greatest gifts have been unsuccessful.

2. Hereby such particular application of the word hath been made to the conscience, as hath filled the secure soul with terror, and humbled the proud man to the dust, and made him cry, *Wo's me, I am undone, I abhor myself in dust and ashes.* Those who before were puffed up with pride and a conceit of themselves, have been soon laid low under a sense of their guilt,

and ill-deservings before God. Those who have been mounted upon an imaginary throne of their own righteousness, and have been at great pains to prop and support it, have of a sudden come down from it, tumbled it to the ground, and submitted humbly to a borrowed righteousness, saying, Away with all my own filthy rags, Give me Christ who is *the Lord our righteousness*: None but Christ.

3. It is a wonderful change to see mens natures quite altered; to see those who were like ravening wolves become like meek lambs; those who were formerly actuated by hatred and envy, malice and revenge against enemies, brought to love all men, even their greatest enemies, with a love of benevolence, to avoid revenge, to forgive them, to pray for them, and do them good when in their power.— Again, to see covetous men that were great lovers of the world, and hugged it as their beloved idol, abandon it with disdain, *seek those things which are above*, and delight in converse about them; to see them made willing to forsake all the world as loss and dung for Christ and things above, is a change above the power of nature, and is an evident proof of the glorious ministration of the Spirit.

4. By the Spirit's ministration, those who hated serious godliness, derided it as a fancy, mocked and reproached godly persons; have been made to own there is a reality in religion, and to love and commend that which they hated and cried down, and to honour religious persons as the excellent ones of the earth, and to delight more in their society than ever they did in their old companions in sin. This surely is the finger of God.

5. Hereby those who have been violent adversaries of the truth, have become eminent instruments to maintain and promote that which they once destroyed, and more zealous to promote and advance God's glory and kingdom in the world, than ever they were to

oppose it. Yea, those who have been very active in persecuting the professors of religion both with tongue and hand, have so far changed their course, as to join themselves to those whom they persecuted, and voluntarily chose to suffer reproach and affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

6. Hereby, those who formerly were wandering after the riches, honours, preferments and vanities of the world, and placed all their happiness in them, and spent all their cares and thoughts about them; have been brought to be mainly taken up in wondering at the love of God in sending Christ into the world to satisfy justice for our sins, and bear that wrath and curse we should have borne; and have been made to take more pleasure in thinking and speaking of Christ, and in spiritual exercises, than ever they had in all their worldly enjoyments; and willingly to resign all these to God's disposal, saying, If my main portion be secured to me, let God do with these external things as he pleaseth. These surely are glorious changes.

7. The Spirit's ministration appears the more glorious in this, that sometimes these changes are made on those who had not the benefit of good example or education, but were brought up in families where they neither saw nor heard any thing to the advantage of religion, but on the contrary, much to fear and discourage them from it; such as bitter invectives against it, and cruel mockings and scoffs at those who owned it: And yet in the face of all discouragement, danger, and persecution, they have been brought to embrace religion, take up the cross and follow Christ.

8. By the Spirit's ministration many weak and feeble souls have been wonderfully strengthened and encouraged, power hath been given to the faint, and strength increased to them who had no might. The feeble have been made like David, and all their dis-

couragements and complaints removed. They who could perform no duty, bear no burden, encounter no danger; have been wonderfully strengthened both for work and warfare, duty and difficulty; and fortified against all fears, corruptions, temptations, afflictions and persecutions, and made to say with David, *Psal. xxvii. 3. Tho' an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; tho' thousands rise up against me, I will not be dismayed.* And with Paul, *Phil. iv. 13. I can do all things thro' Christ that strengtheneth me.*—Hereby those who hath been oppressed with doubtings and waverings about the truths of God, have been confirmed and established, and made to say with Nathaniel, *John i. 49. Rabbi, thou art the King of Israel, thou art the Son of God.* And with unbelieving Thomas, *John xx. 28. My Lord and my God.* And like the Israelites in Elijah's time, when the Lord manifested himself by fire, an usual emblem of the Spirit, *1 Kings xviii. 39.* they were made to fall on their faces, and cry out, *The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God.*

Lastly, The ministration of the Spirit is glorious in regard of the glorious intercourse and communion with God, which souls thereby attain to in the ordinances. Then he makes good that word to them, *Jer. xxxi. 25. I have satiated every weary soul, and replenished every sorrowful soul.* Then he puts more gladness in their hearts, than when corn, wine and oil abound. Then he makes their doubts and unbelief to vanish, and all their clouds and darkness, fears and jealousies to flee away. Now, they attain to this blessed intercourse, when he gives them such discoveries of a crucified Jesus, and his infinite fulness and suitableness to their case, as fills them with peace and joy in believing, and in laying the stress of their souls, and burden of their guilt upon him. He helps them and embrace and apply the promises of the covenant; and to lay claim to them as their own, and say, *This*

and that promise is mine, and plead with David, Psal. cxix. 49. 'Remember the word unto thy servant, 'upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' And the pleading and feeding on a promise doth afford much inward sweetness and satisfaction to the soul. He also affords them such delight in God's work, such strength in performing of duty, that it is their meat and drink to do his will, and they reckon a day in his courts better than a thousand elsewhere. So that tho' sometimes they have come to duties with deadness and straitnings of spirit, yet they have got such relief, that with Hannah they have been helped to pour out their hearts to God in prayer, and have gone away *with their countenance no more sad*. He gives them such discoveries of God's love to their souls thro' Christ, as fills them with inward hope and consolation; yea, sometimes such a strong assurance of God's favour and of the pardon of their sins, and of the glory to be revealed, that their souls are made to overflow with joy. This communion and fellowship with God by the ministration of the Spirit, God's people in all ages have found, and they declared it to be the greatest reality, when stepping over the threshold of time into eternity, and they have died with the high praises of God in their mouths for it.

A P P L I C A T I O N.

Infer. 1. See hence what thanks, and praise we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased the ministration of the Spirit to us by his blood. Hence days of the Spirit's influences are called *Days of the Son of Man*, Luke xvii. 22. All our nearness and intercourse with God is by the blood of Jesus, Eph ii. 13. So that it is with a great sum we obtain this freedom.

Infer. 2. See then from whence it is that gospel-ordinances have their glory, even from the ministra-

tion of the Spirit. Without this, ordinances are dead and lifeless, and dead things have no beauty. We must look to the holy Spirit then, to put life in ordinances, and make gospel-days glorious. Also it is to be regreted, that so many look to the language and outward ornaments of sermons, more than to the ministration of the Spirit for their beauty and excellency.

Infer. 3. How dreadful a crime must it be for any to ridicule or mock at the ministration of the Spirit; or to call it all fancy, whim, or enthusiasm! Oh; what is this but to reproach and do despite to the Spirit of grace! How provoking must it be for men to scoff at that which is the glory of ordinances, and the glory of any land? Surely they are real objects of pity, and exposed to great judgments, who are so far left and given up, as to glory in their shame, be ashamed of their glory, and mock at that which is the greatest blessing of heaven! O if they would stand in awe of this sin, and remember that word, Isa. xxviii. 22. *Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your hands be made strong.*

II. A second use of this doctrine may be of exhortation; and here let me exhort all the hearers of the gospel to pray earnestly to God that he may be pleased to make the gospel the ministration of the Spirit to them, as it hath been to our ancestors in this land in former days, and as it is this day in other countries. Let us cry with the church, Lam. v. 21. *Renew our days as of old:* And with David, Psal. lxxiii. 3. *Let us see thy power and glory in the sanctuary, as in former times.* And with Isaiah, Isa. li. 9. *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord: Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.* Let us plead with the church, Psal. xlv. 1, 23, 26. *We have heard with ours, O God; our fathers have told us what works thou didst in their days, in the times of old: Awake, why sleepest thou? Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies sake.* So let the people of Scotland say:

“ Lord, our fathers have told us what glorious gospel-days they had by the ministration of the Spirit, when the Captain of our salvation took to him his great power, and rode in triumph in the chariot of salvation; his arrows were sharp in the hearts of his enemies, and hundreds dated their conversion from one sermon. Ah! we have sinned away Christ and his Spirit from the land.” O if all ranks would join to pray him back again; and cry, *Arise O Lord, and have mercy upon Zion; let the time to favour her, yea, the set time be now come* It is commonly observed when the set time for favouring Zion with the glorious ministration of the Spirit is at hand. God useth to pour out a spirit of prayer upon his people; for he loves to bring about his glorious designs by means of their prayers, that he may put honour upon them. I might add many motives to frequency and fervency in such prayers.

As, 1. Consider the excellency and usefulness of the ministration of the Spirit. It would beautify the church and her assemblies, - make her beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. It would make both ministers and people to shine, our congregations to look with another face, and ordinances to have a new lustre. — It would put life and strength in the members of the church, give life to their bones, vigour to their withered graces, and strengthen them to run on God's errands and fight his battles. It would enable them to trample on Satan, and triumph over sin, wax valiant in battle, and put to flight the armies of the aliens. It would be as wind to the sails and oil to the wheels, and make souls to run the ways of God's commands without fainting or wearying. It would loose bonds, enlarge hearts, and give freedom from Satan's temptations, and strong lusts: It would revive drooping souls, turn their water into wine, their sorrow into joy, their fears

into holy confidence, their doubts into godly assurance, their complaints into praises, and make them to sing in the ways of the Lord.—It would satisfy their souls, and all their faculties, as with marrow and fatness, bring light to the mind, freedom to the will, strength to the memory, peace to the conscience, and life to all the graces. Yea, it would make the soul to grow in graces, and ripen apace for heaven. It would make professors of religion grow more sincere in duties, more fervent in prayer, more attentive in hearing, more frequent in meditation, more practical in knowledge, more edifying in converse, more humble for defects, and more thankful for mercies.

2. Consider the melancholy case of the church for want of the ministration of the Spirit. Her beauty is quite marred, her gold becomes dim, and her most fine gold is changed. Her womb is barren, her breasts dry, and her ordinances dead and lifeless. Satan reigns and prevails, and precious souls are an easy prey to his teeth. And believers themselves fall under sad languishings and decays. Whereas the Spirit's ministration would soon change the face of affairs, and roll away the reproach of barrenness under gospel-means, wherewith enemies are apt to upbraid us, saying, *Where is your God?* Where is the fruit of your many sermons, fasts and prayers, and solemn communions? This was like a sword in David's bones, Psal. xliii. 10. when they said unto him, *Where is thy God?*

3. Take a view of the largeness of Satan's kingdom in the world: How great is the number of his subjects! And will not every loyal subject of Christ be concerned and troubled to see the devil possessing such large territories, when their Redeemer has but a little flock? Oh! can you see your King's country overspread with enemies as thick as grasshoppers, when Christ's army are pitched before them like two little flocks of kids, and not be affected and grieved for it?

Now the only remedy for it is, to pray for the glorious ministration of the Spirit. This would soon make a mutiny and desertion in Satan's camp, diminish his followers, and increase the army and kingdom of our dear Jesus. But to sum up all:

4. A day of the ministration of the Spirit would bring many rare and rich blessings along with it, such as discoveries of the Redeemer's glory, convictions of the evil and vileness of sin, many crowns of victory and triumph to Christ, great additions to his friends and followers. Then gospel-light would shine clear, saving knowledge increase, ignorance and error vanish, riches of free grace would be displayed, and Satan be bound up. Then ministers and ordinances would be lively, secure sinners would be awakened, dead souls would live, hard hearts would be melted, strong lusts subdued, and many sons and daughters born to God. Such a day would heal divisions, cement breaches, make us all of one heart and mind, and bring down heaven to earth. This would redress our grievances, remove our complaints, and unite Christ's scattered flock. It would make true religion and holy persons to be in esteem, vice to be in disgrace, and iniquity as ashamed to hide its face. Then sabbaths and communions would be days of heaven. Prayer and praise, spiritual converse, talking of Christ and redeeming love would be our chiefest delight. O then pray for such a time.

Quest. What shall we do that our prayers may be prevalent for the glorious ministration of the Spirit to the church and land?

Ans. Take these directions:

1. Let us lament after a departed God, as the penitent Israelites did, 1 Sam. vii. 2. *All Israel lamented after the Lord.* They were sensible of their loss, confessed they had sinned him away, and wrestled for his return.

2. Search out the Achan in the camp, old or late sins, which may provoke God to withhold his Spirit from us. Mourn bitterly for it: Apply to the blood of Jesus for pardon: Abhor and put it away.

3. Be thankful for the least droppings of the Spirit, entertain them kindly, and plead that they may be the forerunners of a greater shower.

4. Use arguments in prayer for the ministration of the Spirit: Plead the multitude of dry bones, which are scattered up and down the valley of vision. How general is the deadness both among ministers and people! And nothing can revive them but the breath of the Lord. Cry, with the prophet, Ezek. xxxvii. 9. *Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.*—Plead your inability to do any spiritual good thing without the Spirit; Lord, we can neither pray, praise, mourn, believe, repent, meditate, read, hear, or communicate without the ministration of the Spirit; we can do nothing spiritually: all we do is in a natural, carnal way, which cannot be pleasing to thee.—Plead also the promises of the new covenant, which are free and absolute concerning the giving of the Holy Spirit; such as those in Isa. xlv. 3. Ezek. xxxvi. 27. God would have us to turn these his promises into prayers, if we would share in them: for he saith after making them, that he will be *enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them*, Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

Object. But, say some discouraged souls, we have so grieved and vexed the Holy Spirit, when dealing with us, that we fear he will return to us no more.

Ans. 1. Many of God's people have grieved him and yet he did not leave them finally.—2. Have you a sense of guilt in this matter? Is it the grief and trouble of your heart that you have so grieved the Holy Spirit? Are the breathings of your souls after his return? then surely he is not wholly with-drawn; for if he were, you would be without sense and feeling.

3. Remember that Christ still invites you to come to him for every thing, and for the Spirit among the rest. He hath purchased the Spirit for all that come to him; and those who come to him for the Spirit, he will in no wise cast out. May we all have grace to depend upon his word, and both to live and die by faith upon it, that his name may have the glory for ever. *Amen.*

A Prophecy of the Increase of Christ's Kingdom.

S E R M O N XI.

O N

JOHN iii. 30. *He must increase* —

THESE are the words of John Baptist concerning Jesus Christ, upon the occasion of his disciples complaining of Christ's baptizing, which drew great multitudes to him, whereby they feared their Master might come to be darkened or deserted. But the humble man, instead of resenting it as his disciples did, falls a commending Christ and abasing himself; yea, he professeth the greatest satisfaction in the advancement of Christ and his interest in the world, and compareth himself to a friend of the Bridegroom, ver. 29. that rejoiceth in the success of the match, which he hath been labouring to promote: It being honour enough for the most eminent minister of Christ, to be an instrument to recommend his glorious Master, and to court and make ready a bride for him.

In ver. 30. where my text is, 1. John foretels the increase of Christ's Kingdom and glory, as a thing highly just and equitable in itself, and most agreeable

and satisfying to him, and all other friends of the Bridegroom, *He must increase*: that is, his interest shall grow in the world, his name shall spread, his throne be raised, his crown shall flourish, his dominions be enlarged, and his subjects multiplied. You think he hath gained a great deal already, but that is nothing to what he will gain: And all this is in consequence of the decree of God, and the prophecies recorded concerning the Messiah in Psal. ii. and Psal. lxxii. &c. so that there is a necessity for it, *He must increase*.

2. John foretels the consequent of this increase to himself, *I must decrease*; that is, I must be darkned and disappear. He is not at all displeased to see himself obscured and outshined by the blessed Messiah, whose servant and forerunner he owned he was. No, no, says he, Let him shine forth as the rising sun, and let me disappear like the morning star: Let his name be raised and mine depressed, I cheerfully submit to it, I am content to be any thing, or to be nothing, so that Christ may be *all*.

DOCT. The increase of Christ's kingdom and glory in the world is absolutely certain and necessary. It must infallibly be, for God hath said it, Jer. xxiii. 5. *A king shall reign and prosper in the earth*. Psal. lxxii. 8. *He shall have dominion from sea to sea*. Psal. cxxxii. 18. *Upon himself shall his crown flourish*.

In discoursing from this subject, I shall,

I. Enquire what is that increase of Christ's kingdom and glory, which we may warrantably look for?

II. What are the times and seasons of this increase?

III. What are the reasons, why Christ must thus increase?

IV. Make application.

I. As to the first, What is the increase here meant?

1. Negatively it is not to be understood,

1st, Of any increase of Christ's essential glory as God; for this is impossible, he being infinite, and therefore the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever without any variableness or shadow of turning.

2^{dly}, It is not meant that Christ's kingdom shall increase or flourish in outward splendor and greatness, like one of the kingdoms of this world. No, Christ's kingdom being not of this world, its glory is of a spiritual and heavenly nature, and peculiar to itself alone.

3^{dly}, Neither is it to be thought that the increase of Christ's kingdom is to be constant or alike at all times, or without decay or diminution at any time. No, no, for sometimes it seems to be brought very low, yea so low was it brought under the Antichristian apostacy, that it was scarce visible.

2. Positively, the increase spoke of in the text is to be understood of the flourishing of Christ's mediatory kingdom, and of the spreading of his manifestative glory in the world, which doth consist chiefly in these things:

1st, In the increase and spreading of gospel light thro' the world, so that the dark places of the earth shall be enlightened with the knowledge of Christ; and those places which had but twilight discoveries of him, shall attain to brighter views of his excellency and usefulness, and to a clearer insight into the gospel mysteries, and the way of salvation thro' Christ and his righteousness imputed to the sons of Adam. Then the Sun of righteousness shall arise with more powerful beams of light and heat upon his churches than before, and at length with such clearness and efficacy, as to scatter Antichristian darkness, error, idolatry, superstition, dead forms and ceremonies of man's invention. For how is it else that the man of sin shall be consumed by the Spirit of Christ's mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of his coming, 2 Thess. ii. 8. but by the out-pouring of his Spirit with his word preached, and by the bright and convincing

appearances of the Redeemer in the glory of gospel-light? Then is it that Christ shall increase, and his kingdom be enlarged, when *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*, according to the prophecy of Habakkuk, Hab. ii. 14.

2dly, This increase takes in the Lord's furnishing his church with many *burning and shining lights*, able *ministers of the New Testament*, to be eminent instruments of displaying his glory in the world. When he is signally to increase his kingdom, he will raise up and qualify ministers for the work; who shall be men of large hearts, fluent tongues, and public spirits; shining holiness and piety; undaunted courage and zeal for God; inspired with a burning love to Christ and the souls of men; inclined to prefer the good of Jerusalem to their chiefest joy; and willing to run all hazards by sea and land; to venture all that is dear to them in the world, their reputation, life, and all the comforts of it, for Jesus Christ; and cheerfully content to spend and to be spent for the increase of his kingdom and glory, and the gathering of souls to him. And particularly, it is a pledge and fore-runner of this happy increase; when the Lord sends down his Spirit upon students and expectants of the ministry; graciously touches their hearts, and works an inward change upon their souls; animates them with sincere principles and ends, and gives them such impressions of the weight of their pastoral office and the charge of souls, that they will not run thereto unsent, nor have an active hand in thrusting themselves into it, or do any thing to beget prejudices to mar their success; but will wait patiently upon the Lord, till he shall open the door, and clear their call to enter into his vineyard.

3dly, It imports the increase of the number of Christ's subjects and followers. *As the king's honour is in the multitude of his people*, Prov. xiv. 28. so Christ is glorified in the multitude of his subjects. Thus

shall Christ's kingdom and glory increase in the latter days, when the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord; then the Jews themselves shall gather to Christ's standard lifted up in the gospel, together with the fulness of the Gentiles: they shall fly to it in clouds, like doves to their windows, according to these promises, Isa. ii. 2. Micah iv. 1, 2. Isa. lx. 8. Rev. ii. 15. Rom. xi. 25, 26. Psal. cii. 15, 16, 22. Now what is it that will bring about this glorious increase, but the ministration of the Spirit with the gospel? It is this that opens a great and effectual door, 1 Cor. xvi. 9. a door of utterance in ministers mouths, and a door of entrance in hearers hearts. Then ministers spirits shall be enlarged, and their tongues loosed in preaching; and hearers appetites will be sharpened and their hearts melted in hearing. When the Lord comes with his Spirit, and gives testimony to the word of his grace, then the arrows of the word shall pierce the conscience; the wounded shall cry, *What shall we do to be saved?* And multitudes shall fall under Zion's King, Psal. xiv. 5.

4thly, Then Christ's kingdom doth increase when truth triumphs over error, and pure doctrine and worship prevail against superstition and delusion. There are happy seasons when the Lord doth magnify his power in binding up the winds of heresy and false doctrine, and making pure scripture truths to be relished and preferred to the vain opinions and false reasonings of men. Then he causes Infidelity, Deism, Socinianism, Arianism, Popery, and Arminianism to be rejected and abhorred; And makes men willing to subject their own reason to divine revelation, and to fall in with the plain truths of the word, and the gospel-scheme of saving lost sinners by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and thro' his death and purchase only. Then he brings men to see their own natural impotency and inability to do any thing for their own

recovery and happiness : so that instead of ascribing their good actions and attainments to the good use of their own natural powers, they are willing to acknowledge God in every thing that is good in them, and to ascribe all to the praise and glory of his free grace, who for Christ's sake works in them both to will and to do. O that Christ and his truth may thus increase in the world !

5thly, This blessed increase of Christ's kingdom includes the downfall of its enemies, and especially the overthrow of Mahomet and Antichrist, the ruin of Babylon, and the binding up of Satan, that grand enemy which excites all the rest. This is foretold, Rev. xx. 2: Now when once that time comes, that Satan shall be restrained and bound up from influencing rulers to persecute or oppress the church : from instigating seducers to propagate errors ; and from exciting schismatical and seditious persons to sow dissension among the followers of Jesus ; then the kingdom of Christ will greatly increase in the world.

6thly, It imports the increase of true piety and holiness among the subjects of Christ's kingdom : When they shall study an universal conformity to their holy Lord and Master, and, like him, make it their meat and drink to serve God, and do his will : When their minds and affections shall be greatly disengaged from the world, and the strain of their conversations shall be spiritual and heavenly : Their lives shall shine in holiness and good works ; and their great study shall be to have their spirits and tempers, their walk and carriage in all respects such as becomes the gospel of Christ : When they shall be just, righteous and true in all their dealings, words, and actions ; when they shall be meek and lowly, sober and temperate, patient and peaceable, loving and forgiving, harmless and inoffensive in all the parts of their conversation : and at the same time shall abhor and depart from all lying and dissembling, injustice and in-

temperance, pride and ambition, slandering and backbiting, malice and revenge, discord and strife, and whatever else is contrary to true godliness, and the pattern of the holy Jesus: then it is that Christ's kingdom shall greatly increase.

7thly, There is in it the increase of zeal and public-spiritedness for promoting true religion, and of Christian courage and magnanimity in owning and avowing of Christ and his cause before the world. When Christians shall not be ashamed of a crucified Jesus, or of his truths, ordinances or people, but shall openly profess him, glory in him; and whatever belongs to him; and also bear testimony against every thing that he hates or forbids: and when a spirit of reformation shall be poured upon all ranks and degrees of men; so as every one in their several stations and capacities shall do their utmost to suppress sin and recommend Christ and his way to all around them: then it is that Christ's kingdom and glory will increase in the world.

The second Head. II. I proposed next to enquire into the times and seasons of this glorious increase. God hath his set times for Zion's increase and glory, which none can stop, Psal. cii. 1. . The apostolic age was the most remarkable set time for it that ever was, when every sermon made new conquests, and additions to the church, till every city and corner of the vast Roman empire was stored with Christians. But besides this, we have promises of a more full and ample increase of Christ's kingdom in the latter days, or towards the end of the world; of which Daniel speaks in his prophecy, Dan. ii. 28, 44, and Dan. vii. 27. There he tells us, that in these latter days God will set up a great, large and flourishing kingdom which will break all others in pieces, and stand for ever. That he means the flourishing state and glorious increase of Christ's kingdom toward the end of the world, is clear from this, that he makes the latter days he speaks of, to be the days of the kings which

should divide the fourth monarchy or Roman empire among them. This empire was to be divided into ten kingdoms, called in the Revelation ten horns, and represented in Dan. ii. 41. by the ten toes of the feet of the image. Now the stone cut out of the mount, which is the kingdom of Christ, is said to smite the image upon its feet and break them in pieces, ver. 34. which signifies Christ's conquering the Roman empire when divided into ten kings or kingdoms called ten horns, Rev. xvii. which division hath happened in the latter days. And these horns, or kings and kingdoms, being joined together in giving their power to the beast or Roman Antichrist as their head, do preserve some shadow of the ancient Roman empire or monarchy, seeing Antichrist's power is almost as extensive, as the emperor's once was. Hence Antichrist is sometimes called the image of the beast, and is said to exercise the power of the first beast, Rev. xiii. 12, 14. as being set up at Rome in place of the Roman empire in the West, and as bearing the likeness of the then emperor that reigned there. For at the time the said empire lay dead and wounded by the sword or invasion of the Goths and Vandals, and in effect was not, the Pope got up and mounted the beast, which the emperor had rode upon before him, namely, the Roman state, for that is the body of the beast, and so set up a new image of the old Heathen empire at Rome. The papal power may be well called its image, as being like it in largeness of dominion, in form of government, and in tyranny and idolatry.

When Christ's kingdom was first set up in the apostles time, the Roman empire was in its iron legs, as represented in Nebuchadnezzar's image, that is, it was in its greatest strength. But in the latter days, which Daniel speaks of, Dan. ii. 28, 44. when Christ's kingdom is wonderfully increased, the empire is in its feet and toes, that is in ten kingdoms subject to the beast, as they are explained, Rev. xvii. 12, 13, 17, 18.

Now, as Daniel tells us, it is upon these that the stone finites, and so it is among them that Christ will make his glorious conquest in the latter days. For it is said, These kings shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, not only their power and armies, but he shall at length overcome their hearts, so that they shall be brought to hate the whore and make her desolate, Rev. xvii. 14, 16. which time is yet to come.

Then it is that Christ's kingdom will receive a glorious increase, and the kingdoms of this world become his, as in Rev. ii. 15. Then the great river Euphrates will be dried up for preparing the way of the kings of the East, Rev. xvi. 12. Then the blindness of the Jews shall be removed, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, Rom. xi. 1, 25, 26. These and many other famous prophecies about the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory do remain to be accomplished in the latter days, at least in the extent; such as those that foretel, That every thing in Jerusalem shall be holy: the people shall be all righteous: the sanctuary shall be cleansed, and purity be both in the worship and worshippers in the temple, and no more a Canaanite in the house of the Lord; all nations shall be gathered to see his glory: there shall be no more war betwixt nations: the Jews shall be gathered out of all the countries where they are dispersed, and brought to their own land: they shall be no more separate kingdoms, &c. For which see Isa. ii. 2, 3, 4. Isa. xxvi. 2. Isa. lii. 1. Isa. lx. 5, 10, 12, 13, 21. Ezek. xxvi. 24, 28. Ezek. xxxv. 21. to 28. Dan. viii. 14. Zech. xiv. 21. Rev. xi. 1, &c. Now what a glorious increase must it bring to the Mediator's kingdom and glory, when all these prophecies and promises shall be fulfilled concerning the overthrow of Babylon and Antichrist, the destruction of the Turkish empire, the in-bringing of the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentiles!

In regard the fall and destruction of Antichrist, or the papal power, is the great mercy promised to the church in the latter days, and with which all the other blessings promised are connected; and that the Scripture is more particular about the time of its being fulfilled, than any other; it is fit to enquire what is there said about it. And *first*, let us view the foregoing signs and fore-runners of Antichrist's fall, and of Christ's coming to deliver his people from his tyranny, which point out the times as near; such as,

First, Previous thereto, there will be a great defection among all the churches of Christ. Among God's people deadness and formality shall so increase, that all the virgins shall seem to fall asleep. Errors and false doctrines shall greatly abound, the luminaries shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. Many ministers shall suck in corrupt principles about the glorious doctrines of the gospel, particularly, that of justification; by which means the earth shall be turned into blood and slaughter. Yea, in these last days, there shall be false teachers, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. There shall be many infidels, and profane scoffers who shall make a mock of serious godliness, and the Holy Spirit's operations; and scoff at the gospel revelation, and the way of saving sinners by Christ and his righteousness imputed to us. Also they will deride the promises of his coming to destroy Antichrist, to deliver his people, and to judge the world, saying, *Where is the promise of his coming? for all things continue as they were from the beginning.* Of these things the apostle Peter speaks in the 2^d and 3^d chapters of his 2^d epistle. Nay, so general shall the defection and infidelity of the world at that time be, that our Lord himself tells us, that when he cometh, he shall scarce find faith upon the earth, Luke xviii. 8. that is, he will find few that have the firm belief of the gospel-truths, and few that

have faith concerning Christ's coming. So great have been the reelings of the world, so long the delays of Christ's coming, and so frequent their mistakes who have prefixed times for it, that there will remain but little faith in any about his glorious appearance for his church, when behold he is just at the door. As Atheists, Deists and adversaries of the truth have been much hardned in their infidelity, by the mistakes of those who have been too particular and peremptory in timing future events; so the godly themselves may be sadly shaken, and tempted to despair of Christ's coming, when he so long passeth their reckoning. Therefore said he, *When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* But glory to his name, *He is faithful and true*, and will come at the appointed time, and the unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of none effect.

2dly, There shall be great troubles in the world, and very great fear and distress in the church, before help arise to her, Dan. xii. 1. Daniel is certified that when Christ is to stand up for the church, *there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was, since there was a nation, even to that same time, and at that time thy people shall be delivered.* So in Mat. xxiv. and Luke xxi. Christ saith, that before his coming, there shall be strange signs in the heavens, and in the earth, earthquakes, wars, and rumours of wars, the rushing of nations one against another, and such universal distress, that mens hearts will be failing them for fear; and even then shall deliverance be at hand.

3dly, Christ will appear when his church's enemies are most confident and secure, and particularly when the Romish harlot is lifted up with pride by her success in this or that kingdom, and begins to say, *I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow.* But then it is that her plagues shall come as in one day, Rev. xvii. 7, 8. How confident was that cruel persecutor Dioclesian, of his success against the church, when he erected pillars

with that inscription, *Deleta Superstitione Christiana?* Then he thought he had got Christianity extirpated, and the church ruined; when behold her glorious deliverance under Constantine the Great was just at hand.

4thly. Before Antichrist's fall, one of the ten kingdoms which supported the beast shall undergo a marvellous revolution, Rev. xi. 13. *The same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell.* By which tenth part, is to be understood one of the ten kingdoms into which the great city Romish Babylon was divided: this many take to be the kingdom of France, it being the tenth and last of the kingdoms as to the time of its rise, and that which gave Rome the denomination of the beast with ten horns, and also it being the only one of the ten that was never conquered since its rise. However unlikely this and other prophesied events may appear at the time, yet the Almighty hand of the only wise God can soon bring them about when least expected. Tho' the church should be wrapt about with the blackest clouds and thickest darkness for a time, that will be no stop to God's great designs. As a little before the break of day is the darkest time of all the night; so usually it is a dark hour before the day-break of the church's deliverance. Let us not then be shaken in our minds, whatever storm blow, but firmly believe the word of a true and faithful God, That all his promises to his church shall be exactly accomplished, That he will rise in due time and scatter all his enemies; and that the set time to favour Zion will certainly come. May we then be helped to look to heaven, and cry for a steady, fixed and persevering faith, that we may never be shaken, nor carried away by the prevailing torrent of infidelity, but may still be established upon the firm rock of truth for Christ's sake! *Amen.*

Of the Increase of Christ's Kingdom.

S E R M O N XII.

O N

JOHN iii. 30. *He must increase—*

IN the preceeding discourse, I was speaking of the times and seasons of the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory; and seeing this increase in the latter days is very much connected with Antichrist's fall, I was enquiring a little into the time of that fall, and mentioning some fore-runners of it. But to get a more certain view of it, it is fit to enquire into the Scripture-account of the time and length of Antichrist's reign; which, according to Rev. xi. 2, 3 and xii. 6, 14. and xiii. 5. doth amount to 1260 years. as is generally agreed to. No if we could hit upon the time when these years began, we should certainly know when his reign would end. But God, for our trial and exercise, hath left us much in the dark when to begin them. Thus also dealt God with his people in ancient times; for tho' he told them their bondage in Egypt would be 400 years, their captivity in Babylon would be 70 years; and from the commandment to rebuild the Temple, to the Messiah's death, there would be 70 weeks of years, or 490 years: yet still the precise time when to begin these computations was much questioned among them. So that they never were perfectly certain about the exact times of the church's deliverance, until the glorious events happened; and then every one saw clearly when they should have dated the beginning of these predicted years. Now

the same is the case with respect to Antichrist's reign and downfall. Tho' now we be not certain when to begin the 1260 years, which is the duration of Antichrist's reign; yet, after the event of his fall, the time of its commencement will be so plain, that after ages will be apt to wonder that we fell into such mistakes about it. Some in their calculations have begun Antichrist's reign too early: others again perhaps begin it too late. Some of which I shall mention, with the grounds of their opinion.

I. Because Antichrist is called the beast with ten horns, Rev. xiii. 1. and the ten horns or kings receive their power one hour with the beast, and give their power and kingdom to the beast, Rev. xvii. 12, 13, 17. Many therefore did begin Antichrist's reign, as soon as the Roman empire was broken and divided into ten different kingdoms; to wit, when the tenth, or last horn appeared, which was the kingdom of the Franks, now called the French, under Childericus their king, in the year of our Lord 456; to which if we add 1260 years, the time of Antichrist's reign, the end of it was to have been in the year 1716; and accordingly many did expect it that year: but the event hath shewed that they began Antichrist's reign too soon. And indeed the Scripture doth not say that his reign (tho' contemporary with the ten horns) should begin as soon as the last of them appeared; and in the year 456, Antichrist was scarce discernible in the church. But yet, in the year 1716 Antichrist got a severe blow, when the Lord broke his interest in Britain, by defeating the rebellion there in his favour, and securing the Protestant succession to the crown in the house of Hanover.

II. Others did begin Antichrist's reign 20 years after, viz in the year 476; because till then some shadow of the old Roman empire remained. For it was not intirely dissolved, nor did the ten horns appear formally in its room, till the deposition of

Augustulus, who was the last of the Roman emperors that reigned over both East and West. Now he was deposed in the year 476, after which time the very name of the Roman empire in the West, became extinct. Those of this way of thinking did also strengthen their opinion from that text, in 2 Thess. ii. 7, 8. *He who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked One be revealed: that is, Antichrist, who then was working under ground, would not formally appear until the removal of the Roman emperor, whose power in the West did greatly hinder the papal tyranny and grandeur. Now, according to this opinion, Antichrist's reign should have ended in the year 1736, but the event also hath discovered they began it too soon. For tho' the bishops of Rome, upon the fall of the empire, made great progress in their projected usurpation, yet Antichrist was not formally revealed so soon as 476. Neither doth the Scripture say that he would be immediately revealed, and begin his reign upon the removing of the Roman emperor. But tho' the Lord did not overturn Antichrist in the year 1736, as to be expected, yet I hope he hath taken a remarkable step toward it, and for the increase of his own kingdom, in or about that year, by raising up eminent instruments for spreading his glorious gospel thro' the world, such as the Moravian Brethren, and the Oxford Methodists; and particularly by sending forth the Revd. Mr. Whitfield, that very year to preach the everlasting gospel with wonderful success. And now both he and others whom God hath excited, have, since that time, made a noble progress in this work, both in Europe and America, by preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit, and with power, the doctrine of free grace, of original sin, of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and of Justification by Christ's righteousness alone; which doctrines had been sadly buried before. And I verily believe, that it is by the effusion of the Spirit*

with the gospel, and the bright convincing appearances of Christ, and free grace in the glory of gospel-light, that Antichrist will be consumed and destroyed; and Christ's kingdom increased and enlarged.

III. Some there are who are very late in beginning Antichrist's reign, not before the bishops of Rome turned grossly idolatrous, and set up for the worship of images, and for excommunicating and deposing the emperors of Constantinople, their civil rulers, because they opposed them in their idolatry. This was first attempted by Pope Constantine against the emperor Philippicus in the year 712: and afterwards practised with greater boldness and success by Pope Gregory II. against the emperor Leo in the year 726. According to this opinion, Antichrist's reign will not end before the year 1973.

IV. But the most probable time for commencing Antichrist's reign seems to be when Boniface III. got himself declared Universal Bishop and head of the church, and assumed the title of Pope, which was in the year 606. And in this usurped supremacy he was then owned and submitted to by the ten horns or kings who gave their power to him. Then it was the Pope became Christ's declared opposite by usurping his peculiar office and titles, and so appeared formally to be Antichrist. Now if we add to 606, the time of Antichrist's reign, 1260 years, his dominion will not end till the year 1866 which is 124 years hence. Tho' none now living will see this, yet we may comfort ourselves as once a godly man did, "I have had a longing desire, said he, to see or hear of the fall of Antichrist; but I check myself, I shall go to heaven, and there the news of it shall quickly arrive, for both angels and saints will rejoice at it," Rev. xviii 20. Why, that will be the happy time of the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory. May God hasten it for Christ's sake.

The Third Head. III. I propose next to give some reasons why Christ must increase as above:

1st, Because of the decree and promise of God, which cannot fail. He hath promised this not only to the church, Jer xxiii. 5. but also to Christ himself, Psal. ii. 8. and cx. 1, 2. And surely *he will not alter the thing that is gone out of his lips, he will not lie unto David*, Psal. lxxxix. 34, 35.

2^{dly}, Because it is for the sake of the kingdom of Christ, and its increase, that God hath made the world, and hath given the administration of the kingdom of Providence to Christ himself, in order to secure the accomplishment of all the glorious promises made to him, the reins of government are put in his own hand, Matth. xxviii. 18. Eph. i. 22. And to be sure the great Mediator will see to his own interest.

3^{dly}, Because Christ is the darling of heaven, dearly beloved of God for undertaking the redemption of a lost world, a work whereby God is highly glorified. In this transaction he cheerfully complied with the divine will, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and therefore his name must be exalted above every name, and every knee must bow before him. Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10.

Application I. Use may be of information.

1. We here see what encouragement we have to pray as we are taught, *Thy kingdom come*, and that it may be increased and enlarged; seeing we pray for what God hath decreed, promised and foretold, and must certainly come to pass.

2. It must then be great folly to oppose the flourishing of Christ's kingdom; they who do it, have a strong party to fight against, even the omnipotent God, who hath said of Christ and his kingdom, *He must increase*.

II. Use may be of reproof and warning to all who would hinder the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory in the world; such as,

1. Those who persecute and oppress his people.
2. Those who promote the violent settlement of

ministers contrary to the will of congregations, and thereby put a stop to the conversion and edification of souls.

3. Those who promote infidelity, error, or any doctrine in the church, contrary to the simplicity and purity of the gospel, and the scripture scheme of salvation by Christ and his surety-righteousness, whereby free grace is exalted and self debased.

4. Those who refuse to subject themselves to the laws of his kingdom, and will rather obey their own passions and lust, saying in their hearts, *We will not have this man to reign over us*: if Christ be a King, let him be a king without a kingdom, subjects or laws; if we could, he should have none. O sinners, take heed what ye are doing; you directly oppose the will of that God who saith, *He must increase*.

III. Use of Lamentation. We may here take occasion to bewail the state of Christ's kingdom in divers places, in which it once flourished and increased, but now, alas! decreaseth, as in France, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, Piedmont, and other foreign parts, and likewise in Britain and Ireland, and particularly in our mother-church of Scotland! Oh! what a dreadful flood of infidelity, atheism, irreligion, damnable heresies, looseness of principle and practice, contempt of God and religion, scoffing at the truths of God and serious godliness hath broke out in this age, and swell'd to a greater height than at any time since our blessed reformation. Our holy Christian religion, in its firm foundations and infallible proofs, hath been openly attacked and ridiculed by profess'd infidels and pretenders to reason amongst us, and that notwithstanding the strong obligations they ly under by their baptism and education to adhere to it. And many pretended friends have been undermining and destroying it, by promoting opinions and practices inconsistent with its purity and interest. Yea, all ranks of us, whether magistrates, ministers, nobility, gentry,

citizens and commons are sadly chargeable with the prevailing defections and declensions of the age. Alas, we have left our first love, and have wofully degenerated from our ancestors piety, zeal, and solemn engagements to the Lord! How lamentable is our neglect of family-worship, secret prayer, sabbath-sanctification, and gospel holiness! As also our losing our former liveliness and spirituality in God's worship and service, and letting our devotion dwindle away into a dead formality, and mere bodily service! And, finally, how strong is the propensity of the present generation to vanity, lightness, plays, comedies, romances, idle diversions, contempt of ordinances, lying, cheating, perjury, and all sorts of immoral practices.

Upon account whereof God is provoked to forsake his ordinances, and smite our church with sore judgments, such as a spirit of division, a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts, impenitency and hardness of heart, suspending the Spirit's influences, so as hearts are not melted by the word. The angel descends not to trouble the waters, and the diseased step not in to be healed as in former days. Our hearts do not burn while Christ is talking with us: the times of refreshing come not from the presence of the Lord. And, alas! we who are in the ministry want not reason to fear that we have a hand in bringing on the judgments, by our undertaking the ministry frequently for carnal ends, and without experimental knowledge of the Spirit's work in regeneration; helping in lax men to the ministry, and discouraging the more serious: Little reading and studying the Scriptures; want of zeal and concern for the conversion and edification of souls: Seeking ourselves in our public appearances, more than the glory of our blessed Master, not looking to him for furniture, and depending on his presence and Spirit for success: Not labouring more earnestly, and preaching more rousingly for awakening and convincing of souls: laying stumbling-blocks before hearers,

by sinful strifes, untender walking, and wrong steps, whereby they are tempted to abhor the offerings of the Lord, not acting as faithful stewards, by rightly dividing the word of truth, and speaking to the different cases of the converted and unconverted, saints and sinners; and not making it the great end of our sermons to convince lost sinners of their misery, to exalt a crucified Christ as their only remedy, and to lead poor souls to him. O that all ranks were brought to acknowledge their guilt, and to lament the hand they have had in stopping the increase of Christ's kingdom!

IV. Use may be of consolation to all the friends of Christ. Tho' you have cause of fear and trembling, because of the melancholy view you have of the church's case at present, her groans and grievances, defections, and backslidings, and the power and success of enemies; yet rejoice in the tidings my text brings, *Christ must increase*. The church shall arise and shine, her light shall come, and the glory of the Lord shall rise upon her. It shall not be in the power of all her enemies, tho' hell and Rome be joined with them, to hinder this increase. Antichrist must fall: He hath been in a deadly consumption these 200 years, and will expire at length. Whatever be the opposition, Christ must overcome, triumph, and increase at last. His church will certainly outlive all her enemies. And tho' sometimes she may decrease in some places, yet we should mind that Christ's kingdom is like the sea, what it loseth in one place, it gaineth in another. If it lose in Europe, and gain in America, Christ loseth nothing. And tho' his church in our land be brought low, yet her Head and King lives, and many of his worthies have lived and died in the faith of it, that he would not leave her, but return and revive his work in her with a powerful arm, and spreading glory.

V. Use, of Exhortation. And here I exhort and obtest all ranks, high and low, to do what they can in

their stations, by their prayers and endeavours, for the coming and increase of Christ's kingdom, as Christ directs, Mat. vi. 10. O how concerned was David this way! Psal. xxv. 22. and li. 18. And also were Asaph, Isaiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, &c. Psal. lxxx. 14. Isa. lxii. 1. Dan. ix. 16, &c. Neh. ii. 3. Rom. x. 1. Consider also the woes and judgments denounced against those who are unconcerned for the interest of Christ's kingdom, Amos vi. 1, 6. Esther iv. 14. Likewise take a view of the blessings which would attend the increase of it. The Redeemer's glory would be magnified, the church would become a fruitful mother of many children, and many sons and daughters would be born to God. Then light would spread, knowledge be increased, ignorance vanish, error be abhorred, Satan restrained, vice forsaken, virtue esteem'd, love and peace cultivated. Then the lives of Christians would shine, sabbaths would be days of heaven, sermons and sacraments would be longed for, the friends of Christ valued as the excellent ones of the earth, and all wisdom's ways would be pleasant and delightful. And what happy times would these be?

Quest. What are these means and endeavours we should use for the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory in the world, according to our several stations and capacities?

Ans. 1 Let magistrates contribute to this noble end, both by their authority and example, discountenancing the immoral and vicious, and putting respect upon the virtuous and godly. Let them with zeal and impartiality execute our good laws for suppressing open vice, such as *drunkenness, uncleanness, profaning of the Lord's name, and of the Lord's day, &c.* Let them in their own lives be patterns to others in justice, sobriety, family religion, and attending upon public ordinances: and no doubt their good examples would have great influence upon those around them.

2^{dly}, Let ministers especially lay out themselves for

this increase, by making it the great scope and end of their sermons to awaken secure sinners, and lead them to Christ; by diligent catechizing of them, and dealing particularly with young persons in private about their souls, and taking great pains with them at their first admission to the Lord's Table. Let them be careful to keep back the ignorant and ungodly from that holy Ordinance; and depend on the ministration of the Spirit for all the success of their endeavours. Let them beware of licensing or ordaining any to sacred functions, who are not of good report for true piety and soundness; and of imposing pastors upon congregations without their consent or good liking. Let them preach to their flocks by their good lives, as well as their lips; and in all things behave as true friends of the Bridegroom, desiring, (like John Baptist) that their blessed Master may increase, tho' they should decrease; that his name may be great, tho' theirs should sink to nothing.

3dly, Let elders in their sphere contribute all they can to the flourishing of Christ's kingdom, by their fervent prayers for it, and studying to be exemplary in family religion, sobriety and holiness of life: by reproof and admonishing of those who walk disorderly, informing ministers about them, and faithfully assisting them in the exercise of discipline, and in ruling and governing of the church.

4thly, Let teachers of youth assist in this work, by labouring to instill the knowledge of God, and the way of salvation thro' Christ, very early into their scholars minds; and to persuade men of the necessity and advantage of prayer, a new heart, godliness, meekness, chastity, sobriety, and justice. And likewise to train them up in the abhorrence of vice in all its kinds, and of every thing that may prove an inlet or encouragement to it.

5thly. Let parents and heads of families do what they can to set up and increase Christ's kingdom in

their families, by maintaining the worship of God in them; sanctifying the sabbath in all their dwellings; catechizing and instructing children and servants, and requiring an account of the sermons they hear; reproving and curbing sin whenever it appears; and earnestly recommending Christ and the new birth, prayer, reading of the Bible, and holy living to all within their gates; and especially to children when their hearts are young and tender, for these are the hope and seed of the next generation. Let us follow the example of the Jews in Nehemiah's time, who repaired the walls of Jerusalem, every one against their own houses, Neh. iii. 10, &c. If every one would sweep before their own door, it would soon make a clean street. And if all, whether in public or private stations, would diligently apply themselves to that part of reformation-work that lies nearest to them, and within their reach, there would soon be a happy change among us.

6thly, Let those whom God hath blessed with worldly substance, imploy part of it for the increase and enlargement of Christ's kingdom, by supporting charity schools, and encouraging ministers, preachers and catechists to travel in dark places of the world, both at home and abroad, for propagating Christian knowledge, and bringing precious souls to Jesus Christ: surely, there is no better use that money can be put to; many of our fellow-Christians have done worthily this way before us, and the good effects thereof are notorious; which should excite others to the like acts of charity and beneficence, which have such an evident tendency to save perishing souls, and increase our dear Redeemer's kingdom and glory.

Object. But (say some) we are poor and in low station, what can we do for Christ's kingdom?

Ans. There are several things incumbent on you for this noble end, be what you will.

1st, Let every man, whatever his station be, re-

ceive the gospel revelation with a firm, unshaken, faith, as the very truth of God, and the way of bringing men to eternal life, which God himself hath devised. Abhor the impious cavils of infidels against it, and receive gospel-truth with warm love and affection. Love and bless God, who in his infinite love and wisdom contrived this scheme of salvation, and Jesus Christ that executed it, by shedding his blood on the cross. Let each one by faith put his finger in the print of the nails, and cry with Thomas, *He is my Lord, and my God.*

2dly, Let every man study to recommend this excellent religion to the world, by conforming his practice to its rules, and adorning his life with shining holiness and virtue; and by guarding against all injustice and dishonesty, pride, passion, revenge, evil-speaking, and every thing that may stumble and beget prejudices in men against Christianity, who are too apt to impute the faults of its professors to the religion itself. If every professed Christian would contribute by personal reformation to mend one, then we should all be mended, and the increase of Christ's kingdom would be glorious.

3dly, Let every one be searching diligently into the time prefixed for the church's being in sack-cloth, viz. the 1260 years. And when (like Daniel) we understand by books that the time of finishing them is near, let us with him, Dan. ix. 2, 3. set our faces unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, that he may remove all hindrances, and hasten the time of the church's liberty and increase. If you can do no more for it, pour out earnest prayers to God for fulfilling his promises of the downfall of Antichrist and Mahomet, the inbringing of the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentiles. And that he would pour out a spirit of mourning and repentance upon the church of Scotland, and other reformed churches, for their decays and backslidings, put a stop to inside-

lity and error, maintain purity of doctrine and worship, remove the causes of division and contention, heal breaches, and restore peace. And that God may grant a spirit of reformation, and of zeal for Christ's kingdom, to all men of power and influence, that they may exert themselves for the enlargement of Christ's dominions, and the diminishing of Satan's: and that he would send a large effusion of his Holy spirit to qualify instruments for spreading his gospel thro' the world.

We are apt to be discouraged, when we see not likely instruments to carry on the Lord's work, and bring about the glorious things he hath promised; and to cry, *By whom shall he Jacob arise?* Not minding that God can raise up children from stones, and instruments to serve him where they were not expected. Tho' we be oft at our wit's-end, we should never be at our faith's end. God can never be at a loss to carry on his work while he hath enough of clay and spirit to form instruments for his purpose. When the arm of the Lord doth once awake for his church, no impediment can stop him, he makes out that pleasant word in Psal. lxxviii. 11 *The Lord gave the Word, great was the company of those that published it.* The pouring out of God's Spirit from on high doth answer all objections, overcome difficulties, provide supplies, and afford remedies in the most desperate cases.

O how desperate-like was Luther's attempt in the year 1517, when he, a poor monk, set himself against the torrent of idolatry and corruption that prevailed under Antichrist at that time! It seemed as ridiculous, as if a man had set his shoulder to a great mountain on purpose to remove it. And so it was in the reckoning of the wisest of that age; and hence, when Luther opened his designs to a great doctor who disapproved of the Romish corruptions as well as he, he bade Luther retire to his cell, and pray, *Lord have mercy on us*; as if there was no remedy. Yet how wonderfully did the purity of doctrine and worship break forth

and prevail to amazement among sundry nations, so as to shake the foundations of Antichrist's throne, and give him a deadly wound, under which he hath been languishing ever since? There had been several attempts for reformation made by others long before Luther, as by Wickliff, Hufs, and Jerom of Prague; but all were ineffectual, because God's time of reformation was not then come. But we see when once that time cometh, no man is able to hinder it more than stop the sun from breaking out under a cloud. It becomes then all the Lord's servants and people to keep in the way of duty, and wait patiently till his set time to favour Zion doth come.

How patiently did Joshua and the priests wait for the downfall of Jericho! Amidst the insults of enemies they continued in their dutiful obedience to God, encompassing the city every day, and blowing with trumpets of ram's horns, carrying the ark still along with them. This they did six days, once every day; and seven times upon the seventh day. All the six days the walls stood firm, not a stone moved, nor a pinning in it loosed; nor was there any alteration for the most part of the seventh day, until the evening, when God's set time was come; and then, without difficulty, all came tumbling down at once. In like manner let us persevere with patience in the way of duty looking to God, and blowing with the gospel-trumpet, which by many is despised as the sound of a ram's horn: but if we hold on, carrying Christ (the blest antitype of the ark) along with us, we shall come off with triumph at last. One thing is sure, Antichrist must decrease, and Christ must increase. Jericho must fall, and Zion must be built up. And however dark and cloudy the present time be, we are well assured from Psalm cii. 6. *When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. Amen.* Even so come Lord Jesus. *Amen and Amen.*

F I N I S.

FIVE

SERMONS

PREACHED

BEFORE and AFTER

THE

CELEBRATION

OF THE

LORD'S SUPPER.

By JOHN WILLISON, A. M.

Late Minister of the Gospel at DUNDEE.

FALKIRK:

Printed and Sold by PATRICK MAIR.

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

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M.DCCCXXVI



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O the hope of Israel, and Saviour thereof in time of trouble; why should thou be as a stranger in the land; and as a way-faring man, that turneth aside to tarry for a night?

THIS chapter was penned in time of a great dearth in the land of Judah, occasioned by a grievous drought and want of rain, which fell out about the latter end of king Josiah his reign: which calamity the prophet pathetically laments, and takes as a token of God's withdrawing his gracious presence from them; whereupon, ver. 7. he makes a most humble confession of sin, in name of the church, disclaims any thing of worth or merit in themselves, and pleads only the glory of God's name.

The prophet's scope in the text and context, is to deprecate God's judgments, and particularly that terrible one, of his withdrawing his presence from his church and people. *Why* (says he, ver. 8) *should thou be as a stranger in the land?* and ver. 9. *Leave us not.* So that he seems to pass from the consideration of the stroke of drought to that of God's withdrawing his presence from them. Whence we may

observe, that God's people dread and deprecate the withdrawing of his gracious presence more than the removal of all their creature-comforts, or any other judgment whatsoever.

More particularly, in the text we have, 1. The gracious titles he gives to God, as the grounds on which he pleads for his gracious favour and presence, *O the hope of Israel!* i. e. the object of Israel's hope, whose word and promise is the only foundation of their hope; *the Saviour of Israel in time of trouble*, i. e. the helper and deliverer of Israel in former times of distress. And then from these grounds he doth, in the second place, humbly plead and expostulate the matter with God, in a two-fold question.

1. *Why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land?* i. e. Why shouldst thou behave to us at this time as a stranger, in keeping at a distance from us, and inclining, as it were, to drop all acquaintance and correspondence with us. 2. *Why shouldst thou be as a way-faring man, that turns aside to tarry for a night?* i. e. Why shouldst thou seem unconcerned about our interest and welfare, like a traveller that comes into an inn, and never inquires into the affairs of it? Or why shouldst thou pay such short and transient visits, as if thou wast weary of us, and ready to depart for good and all.

DOCT. *That as sometimes it pleaseth God to withdraw himself, and behave as a stranger to his church and people; so there is nothing in the world that will be such matter of exercise and trouble to the serious seekers of God, as such a dispensation.*

As this is plainly founded on the text, so also it is evident from many other places of scripture, and the practice of the saints therein recorded, as Job xxiii. 3; 8, 9. Psal. xiii. 1, 2. Psal. xxvii. 9.

In handling this doctrine, I shall observe the following method. 1st, Premise some things for the better understanding of it. 2^{dly}, Shew when it may

be said, that the Lord withdraws from, and behaves as a stranger to his people. *3dly*, For what reasons and grounds he useth to do so. *4thly*, When it may be said, that people are duly exercised about this melancholy dispensation. *5thly*, Whence it is, that this dispensation is matter of such exercise and trouble to the serious seekers of God. *6thly*, I shall make some improvement of the whole.

I begin with the *first*, viz. To premise some things for the better understanding of this doctrine, and for preventing mistakes.

1. However God doth at any time withdraw from his people, yet we must remember, he never takes away his loving kindness from them, Isa. liv. 10.

2dly, However God may withdraw the sensible and comforting influences of his Spirit from his people; yet he never withdraws his Spirit from them, as to his real presence and inhabitation for the preservation and support of their spiritual life, John xiv. 17.

3dly, God's withdrawings from his people are never either total or final, but only in part, and for a time, Heb. xiii. 5. Isa. liv. 7, 8. God never leaves his people altogether, but is still graciously present with them one way or other; if not in respect of comfort, yet he is with them in respect of grace; if not in a way of quickning, yet still in a way of support; if not in enlivening their affections, yet it may be in enlightening their understandings; if not giving sensible enjoyments, yet in giving hungry desires: so that the Lord is still with them some way or other.

4thly, There are various degrees of God's withdrawing himself from his people; with some of them the day is only dark and cloudy; with others it is twilight, neither dark nor light; but with many it is night: with some, neither the sun nor stars have for many days appeared; but with others (according to their apprehension) it is a total eclipse.

5thly, We should distinguish betwixt God's withdrawing from his people in point of comfort, and his withdrawing in point of grace. These two do not still go together: for the first may be where the second is not. A believer may be deprived of the shinings of God's love and favour, when yet faith may be lively, desires strong, the heart tender, and grace in a vigorous condition, but oft-times God withdraws in point of grace, as well as in point of comfort: I do not mean in respect of the habit of grace, for this can never be rooted out, where it is once planted; but only in respect of the exercise and some particular degrees of grace: These may be lost, so as the soul becomes weak, and sometimes very feeble and languid in duty; the breath grows cold, the pulse beats low, *and the things that remain seem ready to die*, Rev. iii. 2.

II. The second thing proposed, was to shew when it may be said that the Lord withdraws, and behaves as a stranger to his people.

1. When he withholds his wonted acts of kindness from them; sees them in trouble, and steps not in for their relief, as in former times. Of this the church complains, Isa. lxiii. 15. *Where is thy zeal and thy strength? The sounding of thy bowels, and thy mercies toward me, are they now restrained?* He suffered their enemies to gather strength, to rise up and oppress them, and bring them very low; and did not seem to regard their cry, nor shew his mercy or power in helping them; but withdrew his hand, and behaved as a stranger that was not concerned about them. It was on this account that Gideon reckoned God to be withdrawn from Israel, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, Jdg. vi. 12. and said, *The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.* But Gideon was so much taken up with the distressed case of the church in general, that he waves the consideration of his own particular case, and says, ver. 13. *Oh my Lord: if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And*

where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?
1stly. If the Lord were not withdrawn, and become as a stranger to us, surely he would not have suffered the Midianites to oppress us so sore, and so long, without appearing for our help. In like manner oft-times reasons a poor discouraged believer, If the Lord were not withdrawn, why should my old lusts (which I once thought were both killed and buried,) rise up and trouble me? Alas! I am left to struggle against them alone, and *iniquities prevail against me*: I strive to stem the tide, but it grows the more; *How long shall the enemy be exalted over me?*

2^{dly}, When the Lord threatens to remove the signs and symbols of his presence from his people, viz. pure Ordinances and Sacraments; when he lets enemies combine, and carry on their plots for this purpose; when our springs are in hazard of being stoppt or poison'd, and we put to seek our *spiritual bread with the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness*, Lam. v. 9. This hath been the lot of God's people in this land; now indeed we get our bread at an easier rate, but alas! we do not prize it, nor grow by it. May not God be provoked then to withdraw it, or send us to the wilderness again to seek it.

3^{dly}, When, tho' the Lord continues pure Ordinances and Sacraments with his people, yet denies the wonted blessing and benefit thereof to them, yea blasts them; according to that sad word, Mal. ii. 2. *If ye will not hear and lay it to heart, I will even curse your blessings; yea I have cursed them already.* This we fear is the case of many; they have the Word and Sacraments in purity and plenty, but do not find them blest; God's Spirit doth not concur with them, and their souls do not thrive under them. Surely the Lord behaves as a stranger to our assemblies, when ministers are straitened in preaching, and people are straitened in hearing; when we that are sent to you,

feel much coldness on our own hearts, and have a number of cold hearts to deal with, and a live-coal is not brought from the altar to kindle the fire.

4thly, When the Lord frowns on his people in the course of his providence, denies them outward mercies, and denounces temporal strokes and calamities, yea actually brings them on, whereby his people are brought very low; they look to God for pity, but no relief comes; their distress is long continued, and their trials lengthned out. So when Zion's captivity was prolonged, she cried out, Isa. xlix. 14. *The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.*

5thly, The Lord behaves as a stranger to his people when he tryts them with dumb and silent rods; trials whereof they understand not the language, and whereby they reap no benefit. This was the case of God's people, Isa. lvii. 17. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.* Tho' God's rod should have led him to see his sin, and lay to heart the cause of the controversy, yet he took no notice of it, but went on in his former course: Many, tho' God's hand be lifted up, they will not see. They are not bettered by his dispensations.

6thly, When the Lord denies access to his people in duty, and breaks off his wonted correspondence with them: They come to God's ordinary trytting places with his people, Ordinances both public and private, but he is not there; they seek him, but still they miss him, so as they are put to cry with that holy man, Job xxiii. 3. *O that I knew where I might find him. O that I knew the place, the duty, the sermon, the Sacrament, where I might find him; there I would go and seek him; I try prayer, (saith the poor soul) but that brings me not to him; for when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer,* as Lam. iii. 8. *Alas! I get not access to God as formerly, he carries now to me as an alien; for when I come and knock,*

I find nothing but a shut door and a silent God. In a word, the Lord withdraws, and behaves as a stranger to his people, when he withholds the manifestations of his countenance, the operations of his Spirit, and the special communications of light and life, which he useth to allow to them that love him.

III. The next thing was to enquire into the grounds and reasons, why the Lord deals so with his people. I grant, the Lord may thus withdraw from them out of his absolute sovereignty; but commonly he doth it for the correction of sin, Isa. lix. 2. As,

1st, When they are guilty of gross sins and scandalous outbreakings, such as cast a reproach upon religion, and the good ways of the Lord, Isa i. 13. 14. This is plain in David's case, see 2 Sam. xii. 14. compared with Psal. li. 11.

2dly, When they turn earthly-minded, and prefer the delights of sense to precious Christ, then he withdraws, Isa. lvii. 17. They that have a strong relish for the flesh pots of Egypt, are not fit to taste the hidden manna. When the Gadarenes came that length as to prefer their swine to Christ's presence, he turned his back, and departed from their coasts, Matth. viii. 28.

3dly, When we turn slothful and formal in duty, and do not stir up ourselves to seek God's face, then he withdraws, as is plain from Isa. lxiv. 7. Cant. iii. 1. If you put off God with bodily exercise, he will put you off with empty Ordinances and dry breasts: If you serve him not with your spirits, he will deprive you of his Spirit. Wherefore, If you would have the Lord be with you, ye must shake off sloth, *Arise and be doing*: according to 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

4thly, When we neglect or slight the Mediator; by whom we have access and nearness to God, we provoke the Lord to withdraw and turn a stranger to us. And this we do, *1st*, When we do not look to

Christ for strength to perform duty, but trust to our own strength for doing it. *2dly*, When we make a saviour of our duties, and put them in Christ's room: And this we are prone to, especially when we attain to any freedom or enlargement in duty. All is well now, think we, God is well pleased, this will render us acceptable to him, and atone for former guilt; and thus the glorious Mediator is forgot, and the idol *self* exalted in his place; which is most displeasing to God.

5thly, When we miscarry under signal manifestations and pledges of God's loving kindness; turn unthankful, remiss, and untender in our walk, after he hath taken us into his presence chamber, and set us under the banner of his love. We are told how Solomon sadly miscarried, *even after the Lord had appeared to him twice*; for which the Lord was provoked to withdraw from him, 1 Kings xi. 9. And has not the Lord appeared to some of you at Communion-seasons, oftener than once or twice, and yet grievously have they miscarried after all? Great cause have ye to mourn on this account, and beg that the Lord may not plead a lasting controversy with you for it.

6thly, When we sin under, and after great afflictions or trials appointed to reclaim us, God is provoked to leave us, Isa. lvii. 17. Has not God smitten some of you, and brought you into the furnace, so that ye melted under his hand? But when in pity he delivered you again, ye soon forgot his dealings, and turned to your old ways. Is it any wonder that he frown and behave as a stranger to you?

7thly, God is provoked to leave us, when we do not entertain the motions and kindly touches of his Spirit on our hearts; the spouse neglected these, so that her beloved withdrew, turned a stranger to her, and it cost her much travel and sorrow ere she got his countenance again, Cant. v. 2, 3, 6, 7.

8thly, When we grow hardened and impenitent under provocations, so as we have neither a due sense of our own sins, nor of the sins of the land we live in, Hos. v. 15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offences, and seek my face.* Ah! was there ever more guilt lying on a land, and less feeling of it, than amongst us at this day?

IV. The Fourth thing, was to shew when it may be said that people are rightly exercised under such a dispensation, as this of the Lord's withdrawing, and behaving as a stranger to them.

1st, We may be said to be rightly exercised under it, when we are truly sensible of our loss, and of our sins as the procuring cause thereof; and hence are brought heartily to mourn and lament after the Lord, as the prophet doth in the text and context, and as Israel did in the days of Samuel, 1 Sam. vii. 2.

2dly, When we place all our comfort and happiness in the favour and presence of God, and are unsatisfied with all other comforts without this, count all worldly things but loss and dung; look on sun, moon, health, wealth, honours, pleasures, houses, relations, yea, life and breath, as most empty and comfortless things without God; so did the prophet in the text, when he addresses him with this title, *O the hope of Israel!* q. d. All our hopes are in thee, and we are poor, miserable and hopeless creatures without thee, and so did the Psalmist, when he saith, Psalm lxxiii. 25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

3dly, When we are at pains to engage our whole hearts, and all the powers and faculties of our souls, to seek after a withdrawing God: *With my whole heart have I sought thee*, saith David, Psal. cxix. 10. And because our hearts are deceitful and ready to start aside from this work, we should be laying ties and engagements on them to be sincere and fervent

about this work, for God takes special notice of such who do so; Jer. xxx 21. *Who is this that engageth his heart to approach unto me?*

4thly, When we diligently lay hold on all opportunities, and use all appointed means for finding an absent God; like the spouse that sought her beloved about all the city, both in the streets and broad-ways, Cant. iii. 2. In all duties and Ordinauces, both private and public, our souls should follow hard after him, and pursue him closely (as it were) from one Ordinance to another, Psal. lxxiii. 8.

5thly, When we wrestle with him in prayer for his gracious return to us, and fill our mouths with arguments in pleading with him, as the prophet doth in the text and context; 1. He pleads the glory of his name, *do it for thy name's sake.* 2. He pleads their hopeless and helpless case without him, who was the fountain of all help and comfort; *O the Hope of Israel, and Saviour thereof.* 3. He pleads the former experiences they had of his kindness to them in their helpless condition; *O Saviour of Israel in the time of trouble.* 4. He pleads his power; it was very easy for him to relieve them, whatever straits they were in; *Why shouldst thou be as a man astonied, a mighty man that cannot save?* 5. He pleads the outward symbols and pledges of his presence he had given them, his temple, his ark, and oracles: *Thou, O Lord, are in the midst of us.* 6. He pleads the covenant-relation they stood in to him: *We are called by thy name.* Upon all which accounts, we beseech thee leave us not.

6thly, We are duly exercised under God's withdrawings, when we hold on in our close pursuits after him, notwithstanding of discouragements and disappointments, like Mary Magdalene, John xx. who would not leave the sepulchre when others left it, but searched it over and over again, yea waited on with patience, still looking for him, till at length she

found her Beloved. Thus was the Psalmist exercised, Psal. xxv. 15, 16. *Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord. — Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted.*

7thly, When we are unsatisfy'd with the best means and Ordinances, unless we find God in them; David was not content with his enjoying the tabernacle, the ark, sacrifices, the passover, and others of God's pure Ordinances: but in midst of all, *his heart and flesh cried out for the living God*, Psal. lxxxiv. 2. Hypocrites, if they have the outward means, are well satisfied; for God's presence and absence is all one to them: but sincere believers he will not put off so, if God be not in the Ordinances, nothing can please them, not the most powerful sermons, tho' an angel were to preach them; nor the most lively Communion, tho' a glorified apostle should come and dispense them. The absence of God is such a great want to them, that nothing in heaven or earth can fill up, but himself.

V. The *fifth* thing is to shew, whence it is that the Lord's withdrawing and behaving as a stranger to his people, is such a matter of exercise and trouble to them.

I. Because of the incomparable sweetness and advantage they enjoy in this gracious presence, while they have it; for this is the sum and compend of all blessings, and hath all good things wrapt up in it. The divine presence brings light and life, health and strength, peace and comfort, yea, compleat satisfaction to the precious soul that doth enjoy it; no wonder then, that the people of God should be so much concerned for the want of it; for then they may cry out with Micah, and with just ground too, *They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* Judg. xviii. 24.

II. Because of the effects and consequents of God's withdrawing from the soul; which being very sad and melancholy, are matter of great exercise and trouble

to God's people : as for instance, 1. There follows usually on it, a great darkness upon the spirit ; as when the sun goes down, darkness covers the face of the earth ; so when God withdraws, thick clouds do veil the face of the understanding, and the whole soul ; so that the poor disconsolate soul is bewildered, knows not his way, nor what course to take, but is made to complain, as in Lam. iii. 2. *He hath brought me into darkness, and not into light.* Alas ! saith he, I know not where I am, nor how it is with me ; I know not God's mind or will toward me ; I see not any comfortable sign, neither know I the time how long ; I meet with many dark providences, dark ordinances, dark communions, all is dark to me.

2dly, Not only darkness, but much deadness and stupidity also seizes upon the deserted soul. Why are our spirits so dead in prayer, in hearing, and so dead in communicating ? Is it not because the Lord is withdrawn ? What these two sisters said to Christ, John xi. *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died ;* may be well said by such a poor soul, Lord, if thou hadst been here present in such a duty, in such a sermon or communion, my heart had not been so dead ; for why, as Moses saith, Deut. xxx 20. *He is thy life ;* so when our life withdraws, we are dead, and all things are dead to us.

3dly, There follows also an unspiritedness and disability for duty : the soul hath neither heart nor hand for prayer, for reading, hearing, communicating, meditation, self-examination, or any duty. Deserted Heman saith, *I am as a man that hath no strength,* Psal. lxxxviii. 4. David's complaint is much the same, Psal. xl. 12. *Mine iniquities have taken hold on me, I am not able to look up.* His spiritual strength was so wasted, that he was scarce able either to speak or look to God. Now, what is the cause of all our weakness and incapacity for duty ? Oh ! the Lord is withdrawn. It is a true word our Saviour saith, John xv. 5. *Without*

me ye can do nothing. It were happy for us, that we were most sensible of this truth, for we are most apt to trust to our own strength, and think still we can do well enough for ourselves; like Sampson when he had sinned away both his God and his strength, yet he went forth for to shake himself as at other times, *but wist not that the Lord was departed from him.* So many are insensible of the Lord's departure, they go to Communion, and think to shake themselves as at other times, but, oh! there is a benumbedness and weakness that has seiz'd on their spirits, they cannot now lift up their souls at his table.

4thly, There usually follows, on God's withdrawing, great witheredness and barrenness on the souls of his people, their leaf fades, their fruit drops, and they quickly turn like the mountains of Gilboa, on which there is neither dew nor rain, John xv. 6. *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.* It is his gracious presence only that can make us *fat and flourishing in the courts of our God.*

5thly, We become exposed and liable to manifold dangers and enemies; for when God withdraws, our defence withdraws too. Hence Moses comforts Israel against their enemies, Num. xiv. 9. *Ye need not fear them; (saith he) for their defence is departed from them; the Lord is with us.* The Lord's presence is his people's defence against all the assaults of their enemies, whether from within or from without, against the power of their lusts, the policy of the devil, and cruelty of the wicked: but if their fence be removed, they are exposed to them all.

6thly, Another effect, which is matter of sad exercise, is, great trouble and anxiety of mind for former unkindness and ingratitude to God. Hence the Psalmist saith, Psal. lxxvii. 3. *I remembered God, and was troubled.* Formerly he had remembered God, and was comforted; his meditation of him was sweet,

but now it was far otherwise : Oh ! says he, I now remember my unkindness to him that was so good to me ; my conscience upbraids me for my unsuitable carriage : *Is this thy kindness to thy friend ?* Where are all thy former purposes and resolutions ? Thy promises and vows made at Sacraments ? Are they all come to this ? Oh ! thou hast sinned thy God and friend away from thee ? It was the thoughts hereof that broke Peter's heart, and made him weep so bitterly.

7thly, There follows on it very melancholy and unwelcome thoughts of death and judgment. When God is present with the believer, he can say as in Psal. xxiii. 4. *Tho' I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me.* But O ! it is melancholy to think of going through that valley without him, and of appearing before him while he frowns, and behaves as a stranger or enemy to us.

8thly, Sometimes there follows a revived sense of wrath, old wounds begin to open and bleed afresh ; the deserted soul is driven back to the foot of mount Sinai, and begins to hear its thunders and curses renewed, tho' he once thought they had been all silenced by the blood of Christ. Thus it was with Heman, Psal. lxxxviii. 7. *Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, &c.*

Lastly, The fears of utter rejection is another consequent that oft proves matter of sad exercise to the deserted soul. Alas ! I fear my case shall never be better, that my sky shall never break, nor my clouds dissipate ; that I shall never recover God's presence again, but be banished eternally from it ; so with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxvii. 9, 10. *Has God forgotten to be gracious ? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies ? &c.* And Psal. cxix. 8. *O forsake me not utterly.*

A P P L I C A T I O N.

Use I. *Of Information.* 1. Hence we may be informed, that there are but few true seekers of God among us, seeing there are few to whom God's withdrawing is matter of much exercise or trouble; few mourning on this account, like the prophet, and crying, *Why art thou such a stranger to my soul?* Many are troubled for other trifling losses, but few that can say with David, Psal. xxx. 7. *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.*

2dly, We may see the misery of those who are far from God now, and are like to be deprived of his presence for ever, Psal. lxxiii. 27. Unrenewed persons desire not God's presence here, but say to him, *Depart from us,* John xxi. 14. and alas! their choice is their judgment, and shall be so for ever; for the Judge's sentence against them will be, *Depart from me, &c.* If the Ephesians sorrowed most of all for that parting word of Paul to them, *Ye shall see my face no more,* Acts xx. 38. how much more will such a word from Christ's mouth at the last day be piercing and heart-breaking to the ungodly for ever?

3dly, How sad must the case of those be, from whom God withdraws, not to return again? the Spirit of God comes, and strives for a time with many; but, when resisted and grieved, he goes away; and when once he goes away from an unconverted soul, he seldom returns to strive any more. When the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, he came not again, but an evil spirit in his place, 1 Sam. xvi. 14.

4thly, Believers should not conclude that God has cast them off because he is as a stranger to them for a time; for this hath been the lot of the dearest of God's children, yea, even of his own beloved Son himself, when in this world.

Use II. Of *Reproof*. 1. To those who are so great strangers to religion, and the state of their own souls, that they know not what God's presence or absence is; and so indifferent are many about this matter, they never enquired to this day, whether God be a stranger or a friend to their souls.

2dly, To these believers, towards whom God may be behaving as a stranger, and yet they are insensible of it. They are become so unwatchful, and so much charmed with the delights of sense, and their spiritual senses so dull, that they are fallen into Samson's condition, Judges xvi. 20. "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

3dly, To these who, tho' they be sensible of the Lord's withdrawings, yet are not duly affected therewith: It is not matter of serious soul-exercise to them, as it was to Jeremiah in the text, and to Job, Job xxiii. 3, 8, 9. and to the Israelites, 1 Sam. vii. 2. "Who lamented after the Lord."

4thly, To these who are so far from being suitably exercised and affected with the Lord's withdrawings from them, that they are still sinning him farther away; by their formality in duty, untenderness of walk, slighting of the Spirit's motions, and venturing on sins against light. O believer! is this thy kindness to thy friend! Dost thou thus requite the Lord? We do not marvel to see persecutors, and haters of God driving him away, or to see Christ receiving wounds from his enemies; but O! it is sad that precious Christ should get such wounds in the house of his friends.

Use III. Of *Exhortation* to two sorts of persons. 1st, To those who are strangers to God, and know nothing of his presence. 2dly, To those who have known it, but he is become a stranger to them.

As to the first sort, I exhort you in the name of the Lord, to bethink yourselves and consider your misery in this state; "for lo, they that are far from God shall perish. It is the character of those who are in a lost

state, to be without God in the world. Now, your misery, while such, is inexpressible. *1st*, You are utterly unfit to come to the Lord's table; for what communion can there be betwixt light and darkness! Or, betwixt those that have hitherto been strangers and enemies to one another. Remember, it is only a feast for friends; strangers to God are debarred. *2dly*, Your state is most uncomfortable; the sun hath never risen upon you; God's face hath never shined upon you; it is still dark night with you, and you sit in the region and shadow of death. *3dly*, You are under the dominion of Satan, the prince and ruler of darkness. *4thly*, You are under the heavy clouds of God's wrath and indignation. *5thly*, You sit constantly on the very border of hell. *6thly*, O sinner! consider what a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a dying hour will prove to thee. When thy soul is stepping forth into another world, how ready will it be to shrink back, and say, How shall I appear before that God, who has always been a stranger to me, and with whom I never had the least acquaintance! Can I look for any thing but a frowning Judge, and a fearful sentence? O strangers, come and acquaint yourselves with God now, accept of his offers of mercy, and be at peace with him thro' Christ; and thereby shall good come unto you.

Exhort. II. To those who have had acquaintance with God, but he is become a stranger to them. O poor soul, be suitably weighted and affected with this dispensation; let it be matter of exercise to thee upon a fast-day before the Communion: it will be a heartless and fruitless Communion, if God continue as a stranger to thee; therefore be not easy under his withdrawals.

Consid. 1st. Your souls grievances can never be removed while God keeps at a distance from you; but they will still be growing greater: as for instance, While he is a stranger, you cannot have light for your

darkness, but darkness will be increasing: you cannot have life for your deadness, but you will still be growing deader in spiritual things: you cannot have appetite for your food, but you will always be turning the more indifferent about it: you cannot have protection from your enemies, but you will still be brought the more under their power. Things will still be growing worse, the longer God is a stranger to thy soul.

2dly, Ordinances can neither be pleasant nor profitable to thee, while God is a stranger to thy soul; you cannot see any beauty in them, while God is absent; for without the Lord's presence, Ordinances are dead, and a dead thing can have no beauty. It is his presence that puts a lustre on Ordinances, and makes them shine, so as to confirm the friends of the gospel, and make enemies ashamed of their opposition. It is his presence that puts life in Communion, and life in Communicants, and causes them to prefer a day in *God's courts* to a thousand elsewhere. It is his presence that makes Ordinances fruitful, and his people's souls to thrive under them. O! why have you such lean souls and barren hearts under Ordinances! It is, because the Lord is a stranger to them. Would you have your food blest, gospel-seasons fruitful, and your souls under the influence thereof, like watered gardens? Then seek the Lord's presence, 1 Cor. iii. 7. "It is not he that planteth, nor he that watereth, but God that gives the increase."

Quest. Seeing God is setting a solemn tryft with us at this occasion, and it highly concerneth us to make ready to meet with him: how shall we be exercised on this fast-day, so as to get distance removed, and breaches made up, that God may not be a stranger to us on the feast-day?

Ans. I shall give you some advices, and draw to a close.

1st. Make no harsh construction of God's dealings

with your souls, whatever they be, but justify him; leave your complaints upon yourselves, and blame your sins, that separate betwixt you and your God, Isa. lix. 2. We have a challenge from God that may soon silence all our murmuring, Jer. ii. 17. "Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God?"

2dly, Be still restless, dissatisfied and uneasy in your minds, till the distance and estrangement be removed: and be expressing your uneasiness by frequent sighs, complaints and lamentations after God; sit as a widow in his absence, and let none have your love but him alone; refuse all other comforters, till he himself return; imitate the church's practice, Lam. i. 16. "For these things I weep, mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the Comforter that should relieve my soul, is far from me."

3dly, Search diligently for the cause of the Lord's estrangement from you, as the Psalmist did, Psal. lxxvii. 6. "I communed with mine own heart, my spirit made diligent search." O! where is the idol? What is the sin that hath been the Achan in the camp, and provoked God to turn his back? And as soon as you find it out, see that you cast out the accursed thing. Let not thine eye pity, neither do thou spare it; for it has taken thy Lord away from thee. If thou canst not find it, then go humbly to God, and cry with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me," Job x. 2. Lord, what is the evil, the sin or lust which thou rebukest, and for which thou pleadest the controversy? Have I quenched thy Spirit? Have I neglected duty? Was I formal in communicating, or unthankful for former intimations of thy love? "Lord, what I see not, teach thou me; make me to know my transgressions, and my sin."

4thly, Seek to be deeply humbled for every evil and sin that you are convinced of; and particularly, for the heinous aggravations of them; say, Oh Lord!

I am guilty in thy sight; I have sinned against more light, more mercies, more vows, and more proofs of thy loving-kindness, than others: I have gratified Satan, hardened the wicked, reproached religion, and dishonoured God more by my sins, than others do; so that thou mayest justly frown on me, and make the solemn day, which will be a day of feasting, rejoicing and gladness to thy children, a day of darkness, gloominess, and distress to me.

5thly, Plead by faith the Redeemer's blood, for removing the estrangement, and bringing thy soul nigh to God; for nothing else can do it, according to Eph. ii. 13. say, Lord, tho' I deserve not to taste of thy supper, but to meet with a frown, instead of a smile; a breach, instead of a blessing, a cup of wrath, instead of the cup of the New Testament; yet behold the blood of my Surety, and be merciful to me. Lord! I have broke all thy commands; but has not my Surety fulfilled them all? I have indeed affronted thy justice; but has not my Surety satisfied it? I have deserved thy wrath; but he has endured it. Remember not what I have done against thee, but what he hath done and suffered for me; and let me be accepted in him who is thy beloved Son.

6thly, While God carries as a stranger to thee, be not thou a stranger to the throne of grace, but continue instant in prayer for the return of his gracious presence; plead the great need you have of it, and the helpless case you are in without it. Beg, however he deal with you now, that he may not be a stranger to you on the feast-day. Say, "Lord, if thy presence go not with me, carry me not hence." What will a Communion-feast avail me, without communion with thyself in it? I go not there for bread and wine, but I go to see Jesus: and what wilt thou give me, if I go from thy table Christless? O let Christ appear and be made known to me in the breaking of bread. Let me enjoy thy lightsom and reviving company in this

state of pilgrimage and trouble. Descend into my heart by the influences of thy grace, and quickenings of thy Spirit; and let me ascend unto thee, by the breathings of faith, love and desire. Lord, grant the request of an importunate petitioner, and come over the mountains of my guilt. Lord, stand not at a distance behind the wall, but shew thyself thro' the lettice of thy Ordinance, and let me see the goings of my God and my King in the sanctuary. Oh! let me not go away empty from an inexhaustible treasure, cold from the sun, dry from the fountain, hungry, sad and comfortless from a feast of love. But O! let me meet with my Saviour there, see his face, and hear his voice; and let me come from his table with my pardon sealed, my corruptions subdued, my graces quickened, my heart enlarged, and my soul refreshed and encouraged to run in the ways of thy commandments, and so inseparably united to thee, that no temptation may ever be able to dissolve the union.

Object. O! faith some poor soul, I fear all my endeavours will be in vain; for I have communicated unworthily before: I have shed the blood of Christ, and sinned against light; so that I doubt and fear that my day of grace is past, and I am cast out of God's sight.

Ans. However dark your case be, yet surely it is no darker than Jonah's was in the whale's belly; who, tho' he never heard or read of any in such distress: yet when he is concluding, I am cast out of God's sight, he aims at a believing look to God in Christ, "Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple," Jon. ii. 4. Mind also Abraham's case, tho' he was an hundred years old, and his body as good as dead, yet he believed in God that raised the dead; yea, he believed, and hoped against hope. Lord help us to imitate him. *Amen.*



S E R M O N II.

A Preparation Sermon before the LORD'S SUPPER.

The happiness of being in Covenant
with GOD.

PSALM cxliv. 15. latter part of the verse.

—*Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.*

THERE is nothing in the world that is so much talked of, and less understood, than the business of a happy life. All the world is in quest of happiness, some expecting to find it in this, and some in the other thing. The worldling looks for it in riches, the philosopher in knowledge, the ambitious man in honours, and the voluptuous man in pleasures. But how miserably are they mistaken! they seek happiness from the wrong airth; from things that can never suit the wants, nor satisfy the vast desires of the immortal soul. True Christians are the only wise men in the world, for they seek happiness where indeed it is to be found, viz. in the enjoyment of God, who is the centre of blifs. And they who attain to this, must surely be the happy men, for the Spirit of God declares them so in my text: "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

In this Psalm, the royal Psalmist doth bless, and magnify the Lord for the signal favours and mercies he had received from him: and from his former gracious experiences, he is encouraged to address God for future mercies, both to himself and his kingdom: particularly, he prays for deliverance from public

enemies, and the manifold calamities of war; for the establishing of peace and tranquillity, and for the prosperity of the nation; for the flourishing of their families and children, and for the increase of their flocks and cattle: and, in a word, that his people might abound in peace and plenty. Then he pauses, and makes a reflection upon the nation's prosperous circumstances, which he had prayed for; "Happy is the people, that is in such a case:" happy they, who have such temporal prosperity and abundance, who have no want in their families, nor complaining in their streets. This is the judgment of the flesh, and the opinion of most men. But the Psalmist presently corrects himself, and retracts his former judgment, and prefers the judgment of faith, to that of sense: yea, rather, "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." As if he had said, The former estate is indeed very desirable for a nation or people; but Israel, or the people of God, their true happiness doth not consist in these things that are common to others with them: but only in this peculiar privilege, that the great JEHOVAH, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, is their God by covenant and special relation. That this God is their God, and they have a special interest in his love and favour, according to the tenor of the Covenant of grace. Whatever portion such have in the world's good things, surely they are happy; and let others have what they will, if they want this covenant-relation, they are certainly unhappy and miserable; which they can never be that have it, want what they will; seeing the having an interest in God as ours, makes up the want of all other things; for all blessedness and happiness is included here. "Blessed and happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

DOCT. "That it is the greatest happiness we can possibly attain unto, to be in covenant with God, and to have God for our God."

David was still of this opinion thro' the whole course of his life, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. Psal. xxiii. 1, 2. And he sees no cause to alter it at his death; for among his last words, he declares, that this sweet covenant-relation was all his salvation, and all his desire, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

The method I propose for handling this subject, shall be,

1st, To enquire when it may be said, that a person or people are in covenant with God, and have a special interest in him as theirs :

2^{dly}, What is imported in this great privilege, to have God for our God.

3^{dly}, How this privilege appears to be the top of our happiness.

4^{thly}, Make improvement of the whole.

I begin with the *first*, When it may be said, that a person or people are in covenant with God, &c.

And for clearing this point the more, I shall First, Consider it negatively, and shew what it is not; and, Secondly, positively, wherein it doth really consist.

I. *Negatively*, To stand in a covenant-relation to God, is not to be understood here,

1st, Of our being under the bond and engagement of the covenant of works. Tho' it is most certain, that all Adam's posterity, by virtue hereof, are engaged to God, to perform perfect obedience, and fulfil the whole law; yea, and by breaking it, are obliged to pay the penalty thereof, bear God's curse, underly death, and satisfy God's infinite justice; and so all of us are naturally in covenant with God in this respect. But oh! we have no happiness, no comfort by being so; seeing we have broke the covenant of works, and incurred the penalty thereof; for, tho' we still stand under engagements to God, by it; yet he is loosed from all obligation to us, to make us happy: yea, by our breaking it, he is under engagement to destroy us. Oh! we cannot, by this covenant, plead any interest

in God as our God, or Father : no, we can only look on him as our Law-giver, our Judge, our punisher and enemy. That is all the relation that God stands in now to us, by virtue of the covenant of works.

2dly, There is more requisite to make up this covenant-relation to God, than that blessed covenant of redemption, which God entered into from eternity with his Son Jesus Christ, as our head and representative, for saving the elect. That glorious transaction is indeed the foundation and rise of our covenant-relation to God ; but doth not formally constitute and make it up. For an elect person cannot be said to be in covenant with God from eternity, unless by God's appointment and designation : he is never formally in it, till he believe, and thereby ratify and approve what Christ did from eternity engage for him, and personally consent to take God for his God in and through Jesus Christ the Mediator. So that you see the Covenant of Redemption will not save you, nor instate you in covenant with God, if ye can say no more ; there must be something done in and by you, to intitle you to that covenant of redemption, and to infest and possess you of the privileges and blessings therein promised to Christ our Head ; and this is only done by the subsequent ratification of that covenant and treaty, made with the elect in time by the preaching of the gospel, which is called the covenant of grace.

3dly, There is more in this covenant-relation to God, which makes us happy ; than our being visibly and externally in covenant with God by an outward profession of Christianity, and subjection to gospel-ordinances : for thus, every Church that hath the Word and Sacraments, is in covenant with God. Hence the Lord says to the church of the Jews, Ezek xvi. 8. " I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine." They were visibly and externally in covenant with God, by their subjection

to his Ordinances and Institutions. They all did partake of the Seal of his Covenant, viz. Circumcision: and hence, when a visible Church makes defection from God, he threatens to come and avenge the quarrel of his Covenant, Lev. xxvi. 15. All the members of a visible church are federally in covenant with God by their profession of Christ, and being baptized in his name, but such an external covenant relation to God, will not make us happy: therefore, let us beware of resting on it; and let us seek earnestly to be really and internally in covenant with God.

4thly, There is more in it than being nationally in covenant with God, by virtue of a solemn transaction entered into, and subscribed by the rulers, nobles, ministers and representatives of a land; whereby they, with the consent of the whole nation, bind and engage themselves and their posterity to the Lord. This did the nation of the Jews, and so they were God's covenanted people above all other nations of the world; but yet this National Covenant did not entitle them to saving blessings, or give them an interest in God as their God, in a saving way: for many were in that national covenant that never came to be in a gracious state, tho' yet they received many special favours and deliverances upon the account of it. Some in this land have the honour of being nationally in covenant with God, which indeed is our glory, and perhaps the ground of many national mercies and deliverances; though it is not the spring of saving mercies, nor that which entitles us to God as our God, in a saving way. Many may profess to own this National Covenant, that never took hold of the Covenant of Grace, and gave themselves to God according to the tenor thereof.

5thly, There is more in this, than the drawing up the form of a personal covenant with God, professing to consent thereto, and subscribing it with the hand. For all this may be done in such a manner, as will not

entitle us to God as our God in a saving way. This work, tho' good in itself, and profitable to many; yet it may be performed by some in such an hypocritical, formal or legal manner, as doth make it an abomination to an holy God, that looks for truth in the inward parts.

But II. *Positively*, We come to be in covenant with God in a saving way, when we are taken within the bond of the covenant of grace, and do consent sincerely to the gracious terms of it; for it is only by virtue of our coming into this covenant, that we have ground to claim this happiness of *having God for our God*. Now for us to come into the bond of this covenant of grace, is by faith to *take hold of God's covenant*, as it is called, Isa. lvi. 4. And this we do, when we are thoroughly convinced of our sin, misery, and undone state under a covenant of works, and do hence betake ourselves to the New Covenant, or gracious method of salvation proposed to us in the gospel, thro' Jesus Christ and his righteousness; and do cordially acquiesce in, and approve of this noble contrivance, and accept of Jesus Christ as our only Mediator, Surety and Peace-maker with God: and in him do sincerely make choice of God, Father, Son, and holy Ghost, to be our God and portion; and also give ourselves soul and body to be the Lord's, engaging in the strength of our great Surety, to abandon sin, live for God, and walk with him in newness of life, as becomes his covenanted people. Now, when our souls are helped and determined by the Spirit of grace, to do all this heartily and sincerely, then do we enter among that "happy people whose God is the Lord."

II. The second thing in the method, is to enquire into the import of this great privilege, To have God for our God. "I will be your God," is the greatest promise and substance of the covenant of grace, being the great thing stipulated on God's part therein;

Jer. xxxi. 33. and indeed it is the sum and compend of all his other promises. And imports these things.

1st, Reconciliation and friendship with God, "I will be your God," i. e. I will be no longer an angry Judge, but a gracious reconciled God to you: my justice is appeased, wrath pacified, fury is not in me, I have found a ransom in Christ; he is the propitiation for your sins.

2^{dly}, A near relation betwixt God and us; yea, nearer than any relation among creatures. "I will be your God," implies, I will stand you instead of all relations. 1. I will be a Father in Christ to you, adopt you for my children, take you into my family, I will pity and provide for you, I will bequeath to you a rich inheritance, you are heirs of God, and co-heirs with my eternal Son.—2. I will be a husband to you, "Your Maker is your Husband," Isa. liv. 5. I will marry you to myself, I will love you, cloath you, enrich you, and provide a noble dowry for you.—3. I will be your King, I will take you for my subjects, I will govern you, protect and defend you from all your enemies. Yea, I will be your physician, your shepherd, your guide, and instead of all relations to you.

3^{dly}, "I will be your God," imports a right and title to God, and all that is in him; intimate communion with him, and a communication of all good things from him. Nay, there is still more in this expression than can be unfolded by words; there is more in it, than, I will be a father, friend, husband, benefactor, &c. to you: More in it, than I will give you heaven and everlasting life, or all the blessings of heaven and earth, time and eternity: no, I will give you more, I will give you myself, a JEHOVAH, a whole Deity, i. e. all that is in me, all I am, all I have, all I can do is thine. O the magnificent bounty of God! for when he had no greater, no better thing to bestow on his people, he bestows himself on them.

You may say, How can this be? An infinite God, so great, so glorious, we are not capable of receiving, comprehending, or enjoying him. *Ans.* So far as you are capable to receive and enjoy him, he is yours; all that is in him, is given to you for your benefit.

1st, All he is *personally*, i. e. the three Persons of the glorious Trinity are yours, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. 1. God the Father is yours to love you, to elect you, and contrive redemption for you, John xvi. 27. "The Father himself loveth you." 2. God the Son is yours, to be a ransom for you, to satisfy justice for you; yours to be born for you, to live, to die for you, to rise again for you, to ascend into heaven for you, to sit at God's right hand for you, &c. All this is plain from Isa. ix. 6. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." And Cant. ii. 16. "My beloved is mine." 3. The Holy Ghost is yours, to apply this redemption to you, to change your hearts, to teach you, sanctify you, work in you, dwell in you, to conduct and guide you to glory. 1 Cor. iii. 16. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." So you see, O believer, whatever God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is, and can do for your salvation and happiness, they are yours, and made over to you in the covenant of grace.

2dly, All he is *essentially*, his infinite essence is yours, i. e. all his glorious attributes and perfections. 1. My mercy is yours, O believer, to pardon your sins, and deliver you from guilt, to sympathize with, and comfort you in all your trials and afflictions. 2. My wisdom is yours to provide for you, to counsel and direct you, and to turn all things about for your good. 3. My *Omnipotence* is yours, to guard and protect you from all your enemies, to support and preserve you to salvation. 4. My *goodness* is yours, to enrich you, bestow grace and glory, and all good things on you. 5. My *Omniscience* is your overseer, to watch over

and warn you against approaching dangers. 6. My *holiness* is your fountain of grace, to sanctify and make you holy. 7. My *Omnipresence* is your companion, to attend and solace you in all places and conditions. 8. My *justice* is your rewarder, to bestow heaven on you; and also your avenger to punish these that wrong you. 9. My *all-sufficiency* is your inheritance, for giving you compleat and perfect happiness. My *unchangeableness* is the rock of your security. My *faithfulness* your pledge and surety, for the accomplishment of all my promises to you; and my *eternity* is the date of your happiness. So that, O believer, you see, all God's essential perfections are made over to thee in the covenant of grace, and therein thou hast an unsearchable treasure. In God's attributes, there is a suitable remedy for all these maladies and miseries which sin has brought on you: his wisdom cures your ignorance, his grace your guilt, his power your weakness, his mercy your misery, his goodness your evil, his faithfulness your inconstancy, his holiness your impurity, his riches your poverty, and his fulness your wants.

Lastly, "I will be your God," imports, That all that God hath shall be made over to you, 1 Cor. iii. 21. "All things are yours." All mine are thine. As for instance, *1st*, All my promises are yours: the promises both of this life, and that which is to come; my promises of pardon, my promises of healing, my promises of sanctification, my promises of quickening and strength, my promises of through-bearing and comfort in trouble, my promises of grace and glory; they are your inheritance.

2dly, My *gifts* and *graces* are yours, faith, love, hope, fear, humility, patience, and all the fulness that is in Christ is yours; all these graces are yours as armour to defend you, jewels to enrich you, and cordials to refresh you, while you sojourn in the wilderness.

3dly, My creatures are yours My creatures on earth are yours to serve and sustain you, my angels in heaven are yours to guard and encamp about you. The earth is your walking and sojourning place, the heavens your country and inheritance. In a word, O believer! my Ordinances and Sacraments are yours, to strengthen and feed you; my providence is yours, to make all things work for your good; my rod is yours, my people is yours, my kingdom is yours: nay, my eternal Son Christ is yours, all he has done and suffered, even his whole purchase is yours: both things present and to come, life and death, this world and heaven, *all are yours*, 1 Cor. iii. 22. Behold, when there was a covenant made between Jehosaphat and the king of Israel, Jehosaphat promised Ahab whatever he had or could do, 1 Kings xxii. 4 "I am, (says he,) as thou art; my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses:" so in the covenant of grace, whatever God hath or can do, is made over to you. But what do I speak? For no created mind can conceive, nor the tongues of men and angels, shew forth the full import of this word, *I will be your God*.

III. The third thing proposed was, to shew, how this privilege of having God for our God, in covenant, appears to be the top of our happiness. And this doth evidently appear from these things.

I. From the vastness of the portion, which believers have in a covenanted God, as above described. There is more comprehended here, *than eye hath seen, ear hath heard, or the heart of man can conceive*. In this covenant of grace you have all that's good, all that's great, and all that can make you happy. You have covenant presence, covenant provision, covenant conduct, covenant protection, covenant support, and covenant strength for all duties, trials and performances in this world: And you have eternal glory covenanted to you for the world to come. Now, can any thing be so satisfying to the renewed mind, as to review this

vast portion? It is pleasant for a man to view his temporal interests, to walk about his buildings, plantings, gardens, flocks, fields, &c. But what are these to this portion of the believer? It was a ravishing prospect that Moses got of Canaan from mount Nebo! How pleasant was it to view the lovely hills, the fruitful vallies, the winding rivers, the beautiful gardens, and flourishing trees, in that incomparable land! But all that was nothing to the *believer's* covenanted inheritance. View the covenant, and see who can number the promises and blessings contained in it: time would fail to mention them: Read the Scriptures from the beginning to the end, and behold a dazzling and glorious sight! As the heavens are bespangled with stars in a winter night, so is God's word and covenant with shining promises. We may allude to that passage in God's covenanting with Abraham, Gen. xv. 5. God brought him forth abroad, and said, *Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; so shall thy seed be.* Look, O believer, to the firmament of the covenant, and tell the stars of the promises, if thou be able to number or weigh them; so shall also the blessings and benefits be, which thou hast to inherit.

II. To be in covenant with God, must be the top of our happiness, if we consider the suitableness of the promises, and blessings of his covenant to all our wants and exigencies. All that we stand in need of, and all we can desire is fully provided for here. O believers, what want ye? What fear ye? What are ye troubled with? Here it may be suitably answered and remedied. Is sin and guilt your trouble? In this covenant there is pardon and redemption. Are your sins great? Here's the Redeemer's *blood that cleanseth from all sin.* Are ye condemned by the law's sentence? Here's a sufficient righteousness for your justification and acquittance. Are you poor? Here's fine gold. Are you blind? Here's eye-salve. Are you naked?

Here's white raiment. Are you starving? Here's the manna and the fatted calf. Are you diseased? Here's the balm of Gilead. Are you chained prisoners? Here's deliverance for the captives. Are you drown'd in debt? Here's an all-sufficient Surety. Are you dead? Here's the resurrection and the life. Is pollution and filthiness your trouble? Here's a deep and open fountain that runs continually. Art thou weak and unable for duty? Here is covenanted grace and strength, which shall be sufficient for thee. This covenant contains all necessary and suitable supplies for thy wants; so that if God be your God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, your needs shall be richly supplied, according to that promise, Phil. iv. 19. *My God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

III. This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness, in regard it doth take the terror out of every thing that is terrible to the believer.

1st, This covenant-relation removes all terror from our thoughts of God's holiness and justice. The wicked cannot think of a just and holy God without horror, and therefore, they banish the thoughts of God out of their minds; hence it is said, Psal. x. 4. *God is not in all their thoughts:* For as many thoughts as are in their hearts, God is in none of them. But believers may have pleasant and delightful thoughts of God, as their reconciled Father in Christ: his holiness is a fountain of grace to them, and his justice the security of their happiness. The covenant-relation takes all terror out of justice, tho' the most terrible attribute of God unto a sinner, and makes it, that before was an enemy, become a friend, and enter into a strict alliance with the believer. Before it stood as a flaming sword at the door of paradise, to keep them out: But now it stands as an advocate pleading for their entrance. 1 John i. 9. *He is faithful and just*

to forgive us our sins. O believer, thy happiness is certain; for justice is come over to thy side, and pleads for thy pardon, because the debt is paid, and for the crown of glory, seeing the price is laid down.

2dly, This covenant-relation takes all terror out of afflictions: Why? It alters the very nature of them to believers, and makes them become good and medicinal to them, Psal. cxix. 71. Isa. xxvii. 9. Yea, they are changed into covenanted mercies, Psal. lxxxix. 32. Psal. cxix. 75. Christ hath shed his blood to purchase sanctified crosses to his people. So believers, whatever trials you meet with, tho' they be sharp and smarting, you may make such a reflection as this, The Lord sees I want this, otherwise I should not be exercised with it: My covenanted God knows that this, and no less than this is needful for me.

3dly, It takes the terror out of the alarming judgments of God that come on the wicked and ungodly. When God rises to take vengeance on his enemies, and punish sinful nations with his desolating plagues, you may say, These are the mighty acts of my God and King: These things display my Father's power and glory: but in midst of all, his children are safe.

4thly, It will take the terror out of the death: for tho' death strip you of other comforts, it cannot dissolve your covenant-relation to God. You may sing that swan-song, Psal. xlviii. 14. *For this God is our God for ever and ever, and he will be our guide even unto death.* It is this that gives a believer peace in his latter end: it made David to triumph in the view of approaching death, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Death must surely be the *king of terrors* to an unbeliever; why? It is terrible to think, I am going to appear before that God I do not know, I have no interest in, nor acquaintance with: How can I expect help from him now, whom I never loved, nor sought unto before? But a covenanted soul may say, "I will not fear, for I know whither I am going, the place I know, and

the way I know, and the God of that land I know. Why should I be unwilling to go to my covenanted God and friend, with whom I have had sweet converse, whose presence I earnestly have longed for? Is not death my Father's servant, sent to bring me home to my Father's house, where I'll be put in full possession of all the blessings of the covenant? Surely then the day of my death will be better to me than the day of my birth."

5thly, This covenant-relation takes the terror out of the great judgment-day. Why? O believer, It is the day of your covenanted Redeemer's coming to take you home to dwell eternally with him. Doth not a chaste wife long for the return of her husband? And will not a believing soul, betrothed to Christ, long for the glorious Bridegroom's return to consummate the happy marriage? Let others tremble at his coming, and cry to the rocks to hide them from the face of the Lamb; but surely you have cause to lift up your head with joy, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.

IV. This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness; for it doth exceedingly sweeten every thing that is comfortable.

1st, It sweetens the thoughts of Christ to a believer. When the word brings the news of his glory to your ears, or the Sacrament sets him forth as crucified before your eyes, your hearts may presently warm to him, and cry with Thomas, *My Lord, and my God!* and with Paul, *It is the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me:* And with the spouse, *My beloved is mine, and I am his.* "All he did and suffered was for me; his bloody sweat, his painful wounds, his dying groans were for me. He thought on me, when he was on the cross; my name is this day on his breast-plate: he still thinks on me, and pleads for me, as his covenanted spouse. *I know my Redeemer liveth;*

and because he lives, I shall live also. Good ground have ye to say with the Psalmist, Psal. civ. 34. *My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord.*

2dly, It will make gospel-ordinances very sweet. And for instance, (1.) Prayer may be sweet to a covenanted soul: Is it not sweet to come into God's presence, and call him our Father, and speak to him as such? Father, grant me this and the other good thing which I want. An uncovenanted soul comes before God as his Judge: But, O! it is comfortable to draw nigh to him as our reconciled God and Father in Christ, and with a holy confidence spread our wants before him. (2.) It will make the word sweet; a covenanted soul may read, and hear it as a love-letter come from his friend and husband, and may sweetly apply the promise of it to himself, and say, This is mine; this was God's gracious unchangeable purpose to me in Christ: And O but that would make the word as a lovely song in our ears! (3.) It will make the Lord's supper sweet. O covenanted souls, you can come to this holy table, as to a precious feast provided for you; you can come as God's friends and invited guests, and expect a kindly welcome from him: It is to you he saith, *Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved,* Cant. v. 1. This is your Father's table covered for you; many presume thither who have no right; but you have no ground to question your right, nor doubt your welcome: A communion-day may be a pleasant day to you, and you may rejoice at the intimation and approach of it, and look on it as a foretaste of heaven, and a pledge of your eternal communion with God.

3dly, This covenant-relation will sweeten your thoughts of God's works, both of creation and providence. When you walk thro' the fields, you may say, I walk on my Father's footstool, which he hath given me to sojourn upon while I am here below. When you view the structure of the heavens, you may say,

Behold my Father's palace, where he dwells, and where I will dwell with him ere long : If the floor and pavement of it be so glorious, what must its roof, walls, gates, and furniture be ? Yet it is my home and dwelling-place, prepared by Christ my forerunner. When you consider the dispensations of providence, and God's various dealings towards you, you may say, How great pains is he at with me to promote my welfare, and prepare me for heaven ? Tho' dispensations be sometimes mysterious now, yet how wise and beautiful will the whole scheme of providence concerning me appear in the issue ?

4thly, It will sweeten all your outward mercies : Why ? you may receive them as love-tokens from heaven, and pledges of God's fatherly good-will to you in Christ. Art thou raised from a sick-bed, or delivered from any trouble ? you may say of it as Hezekiah did, Isa. xxxviii. 17. *Thou hast in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption.* Again, every meal of meat, or morsel of bread thou eatest, may be doubly sweet to you ; for it is the fruit of Christ's purchase ; it is dipt in his blood, and comes thro' the covenant-channel to thy hand : Thou mayst spy covenant-love in every common mercy ; thou enjoyest it not as a creature, but as an heir : Thy Father sends it from his own table to thee, as an earnest of greater and better things laid up for thee hereafter. That word belongs to thee, which we have in Eccl. ix. 7. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart ; for God now accepteth thy works.*

Lastly, This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness, in regard of the sure and indissoluble nature of it, Isa. liv. 10. Mutable creatures alter their purposes, and break their leagues and covenants which they made ; but God will never break his covenant of grace with his people. A covenant with a nation

may be dissolved, as with the people of the Jews, because it is not built on the eternal purpose of God, to put his fear in their hearts; but it hath a respect to their obedience. But his covenant with the elect is indissoluble, seeing it depends on God's eternal purpose, to make them persevere in his ways. The covenant of grace doth not run thus, 'I will be their God, if they will be my people;' but, *I will be their GOD, and they shall be my People.* He puts a condition indeed in his covenant of grace; but he has resolved and decreed from eternity, to work that condition in their hearts, Jer. xxxii. 40. *I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.* There we see, that God is on both sides in this covenant, he engages not only for his own part, but for ours, that we shall fear him, and shall not depart from him. How happy then are believers who are in covenant with God! They are a happy people; and nothing can deprive them of their happiness. Adultery may dissolve the marriage-covenant among men, but not so here; for God saith to his covenanted people, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again unto me: Turn ye backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you," Jer. iii. 1.—14. Again, death cannot dissolve this covenant-relation, as it doth among men; but brings us the nearer to our covenanted God; So that a covenanted soul, when he finds death begin to assault his clay tabernacle, he may even rejoice, and sing with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 26. "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." What tho' my eye and heart-strings be ready to break, and the lamp of my life be like a candle burnt to the socket, and near the going out; yet still God is my God, and portion for ever. Thus David, a dying saint, comforted himself, "My heart-

“ing is gone, my smelling is gone, and my sight is
 “going: my speech and feeling are almost gone;
 “but the loving-kindness of God is still the same, and
 “will never depart from me.”

A P P L I C A T I O N.

Use I. Of Information. We may hence see, *1st*,
 How far mistaken the world is about a believer's lot;
 they many times reckon them poor and despicable, and
 the off-scouring of all things; but certainly they are,
 of all persons in the world, the wisest; for they make
 the wisest choice, and the best bargain: Nay, they
 are the richest too, for all things are theirs; tho' they
 oft seem to the world to have nothing, 2 Cor. vi. 10.

2dly, We may hence infer, that believers have no
 ground to envy the worldling of his portion, but rather
 to pity him; for he hath no more than what is seen
 by all, and that but for a short time, Psal. xvii. 14.
 Luke vi. 24. A carnal man may say, This house, this
 estate, this money is mine; but a Christian can say,
This God is mine. And a covenanted God is more
 than ten thousand kingdoms.

Use II. Of Terror, to those that are out of the
 bond of this Covenant: For if the people be so happy,
whose God is the Lord, how unhappy and miserable
 must they be, whose God is not the Lord: Nay, your
 case is unspeakably sad and dismal: and O! that God
 would send a wakening word to all such, and sound
 an alarm in your ears this day.

1st, You have neither art nor part in the God of
 Israel, Eph. ii. 12. He stands in no relation to you,
 but that of Creator, and so stands he to the devils:
 But what comfort can they draw from that? “For he
 “that made them, will not have mercy on them, and
 “he that formed them, will shew them no favour.”

2dly, You are under a covenant of works, and
 under its fearful curse and sentence for the breach

thereof. It is terrible to be under sentence of death by an earthly judge, and to be looking every hour to be taken forth to the scaffold: But your case is far worse; you are doom'd to eternal death, and you may be looking every moment to be led forth to execution. When you awake in the morning, you may say, Shall this be the day of my execution? shall I be taken to the scaffold of divine vengeance before night? Every head-ach or sick-heart, every pain or stitch in back or breast, may put you to say, Is this the messenger that the Judge is to send to bring me forth? Sad is your case, O uncovenanted soul, you may sleep and wake in continual fear: for you are still tottering on the brink of hell, and ridge of destruction. O! tremble then to ly down another night in this condition. *In the name of God*, I obtest you to awake from sleep, and find no rest for the sole of your foot, till, like Noah's dove, ye come into the Ark of the Covenant.

Use III. Of *Examination*. O communicants, try if ye be within this Covenant; remember if you be not, you have no right to the seals of it, no right to sit down at the Lord's Table. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat*: And examine yourselves by these marks.

1st, Know you any thing of a change of your state? Can you say? "Once I was a bond slave to Satan, and an enemy to God: once I loved sin, and hated holiness: but now God hath opened my eyes, and humbled my heart for sin, and made me cast down the weapons of my rebellion at his feet; once I was at peace without Christ the Mediator; but now I see nothing but fire and wrath out of him: once I thought little of sin; but now I see it to be the most black and bloody thing in the world:" Then this is a good sign.

2^{dly}, If you be in covenant with God, you will certainly love God with your hearts, and love the Mediator who brought you into the Covenant. Can

you say then with Peter, Lord, *thou that knowest all things, knowest that I love thee?* Lord, tho' I cannot hear, pray, praise, or communicate as I ought, yet thou knowest I love thee; yea, I love thee above all things. And tho' all the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world were in my offer or possession, and Christ would say, You must either part with these, or part with me; my heart would answer, Lord, abide thou with me, and let them all be gone.

3dly, These that are in covenant with God, have certainly made choice of God, as their God, and portion. Can you say you have done this, O doubting communicant? Tho' you cannot say, that God hath chosen you, yet doth your heart truly chuse him. And are you resolved never to be satisfied without him? and whatever offers be made to you, yet you will be put off with nothing besides God. Then this may give you comfort.

4thly, Can you say you have made a resignation of yourselves, and of all you have to God, and you resolve to renew it again this night in secret, and tomorrow before men and angels? Then it is a token for good. It may be, doubting soul, thou art afraid to say, Lord, thou art my God; but canst thou venture to say, "Lord, I am thine, I resolve to be thine, and "thine only; I will not be mine own, I will not be "the devils, I will not be the world's, I will not be "my lust's; Lord I am resolved to be none's but "mine." Well, let this comfort you when other marks cannot. For if once you come the length to say, Lord, *I am thine*; you may say in the next place, Lord, *thou art mine*; for the relation is always reciprocal: (And this is the reasoning of the spouse, Cant. vi. 3. *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*)

5thly, Are you mightily pleased with the contrivement and design of this covenant, which is to debase self, and exalt free grace? And would you desire heaven, tho' it were for no more, but to stand eternal

monuments of free grace, and join your note with the redeemed, eternally to cry, *Not unto us, not unto us, but to thee be the glory.*

And, *Lastly*, Are you inclined to perform covenant-duties conscientiously, and that in a covenant-way, relying on covenant-strength, and from a principle of love and gratitude to your covenanted God, and with an eye to glorify his name. Then fear not to come forward to take the Seal of the Covenant, for you belong to it.

Use IV. *Of Exhortation.* And this I shall direct to all that hear the gospel, especially communicants. O come take hold of God's covenant, and enter yourselves within the bond of it; and then come and take God's seal to the bargain. I here, in my great Lord and Master's name, make offer of God's covenant to all of you, be what you will, gospel-flighters, rebels against God, graceless and profane sinners, carnal and earthly-minded souls, hypocrites, formalists, backsliders, weary and heavy laden sinners, doubting and discouraged souls; I exhort and beseech you all to come and take hold of God's covenant, make choice of God for your God and portion, and Jesus Christ for your Mediator and peace-maker with God, and resign yourselves freely to God in Christ. O sinners, the covenant is free, the call is pressing, the offer is great, the bargain excellent.

This is the most honourable and advantageous bargain that ever you made; the design of my whole sermon has been to recommend it, and persuade you to close with it: God knows how your hearts stand inclined. But I would have you all to remember that our time is short, and the hour is coming, when we that are ministers must leave this work of beseeching, pressing and arguing with you, and go to him that sent us, with a faithful account of the issue of our message. And O how sad and unpleasant will the account be that we must give of these of you whom we leave un-

persuaded to take hold of God's covenant? It will be a melancholy thing, and matter of grief, to accuse any of you to the Father; but we must do it, if you will not prevent it by your hearkening and obeying. If you do it not in time as God is in heaven, you will eternally repent it; I do here warn you of your danger, and call heaven and earth to record against you, that I am free of your blood. O young people! what say ye to it? will ye take hold of the Covenant? Your baptism will not profit you, unless now when ye are of age ye ratify your parents deed, renew your baptismal engagements, and personally join yourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant. If ye approach to the Lord's table without doing it, you will be unworthy communicants, you will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord, you will but mock God and deceive your own souls. I have not time to answer objections against covenanting with God; I shall only speak to one question, and then conclude.

Quest. But you may say, What would you have us doing, in order to our being brought into God's covenant? We would gladly be of the number of that happy people, whose God is the Lord, and who are in covenant with him; but we know not how to get into it.

Ans. Surely the soul is not wholly passive in this transaction, but must be active in it. Something is to be done on our part, when we enter into covenant with God; and therefore we are called to *join ourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant*, Jer. 1. 5. I do not mean, that we can do any thing to enter ourselves into covenant with God in our own strength; no, it is God by his Spirit that *worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*. The duty is ours, but the work is the Spirit's. It is the Spirit that courts the heart, and prevails with the soul to give its consent to this blessed bargain. But, in the mean time, let us be minding at our duty as we can, looking for the

Spirit's concurrence. And there are four things to be done by us, in order to our being in covenant with God, and God help every communicant to aim at them sincerely this night. 1. Renunciation. 2. Acceptation. 3. Dedication. 4. Solemn engagement.

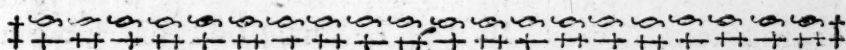
1st, You must heartily renounce and break league with all the Lord's enemies and rivals, Hof. xiv. 8. and particularly renounce, (1.) Satan's government; tho' formerly you was led captive by him at his will, yet now solemnly renounce all subjection to him, and hearken no more to his suggestions and temptations; let God alone have the throne. (2.) Renounce the world, be no more a slave to it as you have been; set your heart no longer on its profits and pleasures, as your portion and inheritance; but make God your treasure. (3.) Renounce the flesh; however its lusts have been beloved by you, let them reign no more in you; but condemn them to be crucified as the murderers of Christ. (4.) Renounce your own righteousness in point of justification and acceptance with God, and solemnly disclaim all trust and confidence in your own duties and performances.

2^{dly}, Acceptation. Heartily aim to make choice, and accept of God in Christ, as your soul's portion and inheritance, Psal. lxxiii. 25. But observe, how God is to be chosen, only in and through Christ the Mediator; for *out of Christ he is a consuming fire*: therefore accept of precious Christ as your guide and way to the Father, and of his satisfaction and merits, as the ransom for delivering you from wrath. Accept of the Holy Ghost as your sanctifier, quickener and comforter; and heartily acquiesce in the covenant of grace, and gospel-method of salvation thro' Christ, as well ordered in all things.

3^{dly}, Dedication. As God gives himself wholly to you, so do you dedicate and give up yourselves, and all that you have, wholly and unreservedly to God, 2 Chron. xxx. 8. Give up your souls with all

their powers and faculties ; your bodies with all their senses and members ; and all your enjoyments temporal and spiritual, to be employed for God and his honour, and to be entirely disposed of for his service and glory.

4thly, Solemn engagement. You must resolve and engage, in the strength of Christ your Surety, to live wholly to your covenanted God, and walk with him in newness of life, perform every duty he commands, suffer patiently what he inflicts, watch against every sin he forbids, and manfully fight against his enemies. Thus be aiming at your duty, and lay yourselves in the Spirit's way, and who knows but God will pity and help you, honestly to take hold of his covenant, and also himself say Amen to the bargain. The Lord bless his word. *Amen.*



S E R M O N III.

A Preparation Sermon before the Communion.

The right Improvement of the Day
of Grace.

HEB. iii. 7, 8.

Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, &c.

IN this chapter, the apostle doth display something of the Mediator's glory and excellency ; he shews, that he is far preferable to Moses, as much as the builder of the house is greater than the house ; and

that he alone is the eternal Son of God, the great Prophet and Teacher of his church. And having laid down several propositions to this purpose, he comes to draw an inference from them in the words of my text, *Wherefore, &c.* As if he had said, seeing Christ is the chief apostle and prophet of his church, a teacher sent from God to instruct the world; it is therefore our indispensable duty to hear his voice, comply with his counsels, and that without delay; and this exhortation the apostle strengthens with that of David, Psal. xcv. 7.

In the words we have, *1st*, The illative particle, *Wherefore*, which denotes the deduction of the ensuing exhortation from the preceeding discourse. *2dly*, We have the authority which the apostle cites for his exhortation, even that of the Holy Ghost, who of old spake by David, Psal. xcv. and now speaketh by him in the text. *3dly*, In the exhortation, we have a duty required of us, viz. Hearing of Christ's voice, *Hear his voice*: not the voice of a meer man, not the voice of an apostle or angel, but of the eternal Son of God, that glorious ambassador of heaven, who was sent to the world for advancing a treaty of peace; his voice we are to hear, his instructions and calls we are to comply with. *4thly*, We have the circumstance of time, and special season when this duty is to be done, and that is presently, *To-day*, or in this solemn day of grace. *5thly*, We have, in the following verse, a cautionary direction to all that sit under the gospel, to beware of hardening their hearts, or stopping their ears against Christ's calls, as the obstinate and hard-hearted Jews did in the wilderness.

DOCT. I. *That the consideration of the authority of the Holy Ghost speaking in the scripture, should mightily enforce upon us the duties there exhorted.* We should consider whose authority we despise, when we slight the offers, calls, and duties pressed in the gospel, even

that of the Holy Ghost; and it is a fearful thing to sin against the Holy Ghost.

Doct. II. *That the voice which we are called to hear, in and by the gospel, is Christ's voice; it is not the voice of a man like ourselves, but the voice of the Son of God, and therefore should be awfully regarded.* But the doctrine which I intend to handle at this time, shall be drawn chiefly from the season of pressing this duty.

Doct. III. *That all who sit under the gospel, should be careful to improve the seasons of grace, and opportunities of hearing Christ's voice, which God allows them.*

In handling this doctrine, I shall shew.

I. What is implied in hearing of Christ's voice in the gospel.

II. That there are some special seasons for hearing of Christ's voice, and what these are.

III. How we ought to improve these seasons.

IV. Reasons why we should carefully improve them.

V. I shall apply the whole.

I. As to the *First*, What is imported in hearing of Christ's voice in the gospel. I shall not insist on what is presupposed in it, viz. That our ears are naturally stopped against Christ; and it is only a work of his power on the soul that can open them; but shew what it directly implies.

1st, This hearing doth import, our believing the word to be Christ's voice, and not the voice of man. As long as we regard what we hear, only as the voice of a minister, or man like ourselves, it will never humble us, nor prevail with our stubborn hearts; but when we begin to take it up as the voice of God, or Christ speaking to us from heaven, then the soul doth hearken, consider, and obey. Till Samuel knew that it was the Lord's voice speaking to him, 1 Sam i. he still took the wrong course: he went to Eli, when he should have hearkned to God.

2dly, A close and serious attention of the mind to what we hear. The soul that hears Christ's voice, stops his career in pursuing sin and the world, which always makes a buzzing noise about his ears, and applies his ear to hear what Christ saith; turns attentive to, and serious about the things of eternity.

3dly, The application of what Christ saith unto us in particular: As if Christ spoke to us by name and surname, and said to us, as Nathan did to David, *Thou art the man*. We commonly neglect what Christ saith by his word, by putting it by ourselves to others; but we hear him aright, when we bring what he saith close home to our own hearts and consciences, and say, "It is to me this word is directed; it is me that Christ intends; it is I that the law condemns, and that justice threatens. I am the guilty sinner that have shut out Christ, and preferred my lusts to him, and yet he now pities me, and calls me to open to him."

4thly, A thorough conviction of the necessity and advantage of yielding to Christ's calls; O! saith the soul, long hath my Saviour knocked, saying, *Open to me, arise and come away*; and yet I have sit still, and given him a deaf ear; but now I see I am lost, undone and condemned in my present case; if death knock before I open to Christ, I can look for nothing but the bottomless pit to open and swallow me up for ever. But if I open to Christ, I am happy, and out of the reach of wrath for ever.

5thly, It imports, the soul's cordial complying with Christ's calls, and consenting to receive and embrace him as he is offered in the gospel; that is to say, as a prophet to teach us, a priest to atone for us, and a king to rule us. The man that hears Christ's voice, goes in heartily with the gospel method of salvation, acquiesces in that noble contrivance of grace, is well content to be justified by Christ's righteousness, to be taught at Christ's school, and goveraed by his laws.

II. The second thing to be discoursed is, That there are some special seasons for hearing Christ's voice, that should be carefully improven; and what these are. There are some advantageous opportune seasons of grace, wherein God is ready to receive and entertain us, which are called in scripture *an accepted time, and day of salvation*, 2 Cor. vi. 2. *an accepted time*, i. e. a time well-pleasing to God. *A day of salvation*, i. e. a day wherein the improvers of it may get salvation begun in pardoning and sanctifying grace; and eternal salvation compleated in heaven, made sure to them. Now such times and seasons should be carefully managed, that they be not lost, as alas they are to many. I shall mention some of these seasons.

I. The present time, when you have gospel ordinances, and health and strength to attend them: That is a season carefully to be improven; and hence the Spirit of God saith so frequently, yea, no less than three times in this 3d chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, *To-day, to-day, to-day*, God cries to you, *To-day, hear my voice*; but Satan says to you, *To-morrow is time enough*. But surely, God's season is the best. O sinner! *To-day* thou art in health, *to-morrow* thou may'st be in sickness: *To-day* thou art living, *to-morrow* thou may'st be dying: *To-day* thou art on earth, *to-morrow* thou may'st be in hell: *To-day* Christ is smiling and inviting you to come unto him, but *to-morrow* he may be frowning, and sentencing you to depart from him, never to return again. And should not the present time, then, when you enjoy ordinances, and health to attend them, be duly improven?

II. The time of youth is a special season of grace, Eccl. xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*: O young folk, this is an accepted time, and a day of salvation: It is a most advantageous opportunity for hearkening to Christ's voice; for *1st, Now*

the heart is more tender, and the will more pliable than afterwards. Now the heart is sooner affected and melted for sin, than afterwards; for old age turns stiff and inflexible. The branches of a young tree will bow, and train up any way, but when old they will not ply. *2dly*, Now you have not such sins to burden the conscience, harden the heart, and hinder you from coming to Christ, as you will have afterwards. *3dly*, Now your minds and thoughts are more free of cares and anxieties about the world, than they will be afterwards: and so more fit for closing and transacting with Christ in the gospel. *4thly*, It is a season that God especially regards. Under the law, he required the first fruits as his portion; and would have all the sacrifices that were offered to him, to be young, and in their strength. Exod. xxiii. 19. Lev. ii. 14. And still he loves the season of youth, and remembers the kindness of youth long afterwards, Eccl. xii. 1. Jer. ii. 2, 3. The mourning, praying and praising of young folk, is the most melodious music in God's ears: Wherefore, let the precious season of youth be diligently improven. Are there not some young communicants here? O! improve this day of salvation; a time of youth is the most usual season of conversion, and acquaintance with Christ. If you look thro' the land, among the people of God, you'll perhaps find scarce one of a hundred, but will date his conversion, and first closing with Christ from the time of youth. If a tree do not bud or blossom, when young, it is a sign that it is barren, and will not bear at all afterwards. O then! now in the days of youth lay a sure foundation stone; take heed to your first communicating; strive for heart-sincerity in hearing Christ's voice, closing with the gospel offer, and covenanting with God.

III. A season when people enjoy plenty and purity of gospel ordinances with peace and safety, ought carefully to be improven. And now you have such a

season, you have plenty of ministers, plenty of sermons, sacraments, solemn calls, free offers, faithful warnings, earnest intreaties, and powerful persuasions, and none to make you afraid. It is prophesied of the gospel-times, Psal. lxxiii. 11. That *the Lord shall give the word, and great shall be the company of them that publish it.* Now you have many faithful labourers; in every parish you have such as publish the word, and preach the glad tidings of reconciliation: Many a time have you Christ crucified set forth before your eyes in the Lord's Supper; and again, the Lord is to give you in this place a new occasion for it. These are precious seasons, which our fathers sometimes would have prized at a high rate; when they were put to seek their spiritual bread with the peril of their lives, *because of the sword in the wilderness.* The Lord hath made his arm bare in behalf of the gospel: He hath disabled its enemies, settled the ark in its place, and still continues plenty of pure ordinances, maugre all the contrivances and attempts of enemies for their oppression. O! for hearts to value and improve such precious opportunities.

IV. A time when God gives a people providential warnings, to awaken and excite them to attend his word and ordinances, is a season to be improved. God hath oft threatned us with a bloody sword; and now he is threatning us with the approaching of the pestilence; that wasting stroke that lays heaps upon heaps, makes death to ride in triumph thro' the streets. Many warnings of approaching judgments have we formerly misimproved; and therefore, God may come upon us unawares, and surprize us with his judgments without warning. Well, while God is taking pains on us, and giving us warning at a distance, let us improve the season by hearkening to Christ's voice in the gospel. Let us be moved with fear, (like Noah) and provide an ark for the saving of our souls, before the flood of wrath approach. Nay, blessed be God,

the ark, is prepared to our hand, and there is a window opened in the side thereof for our entrance : let us take the wings of faith, and fly thither without delay.

V. A time when the inward workings of the Spirit on the conscience, concur with the external dispensation of the word and Sacraments, is a special season to be improved. It is then, that a great and effectual door is opened both to ministers and people. Paul had this door opened to him at Ephesus, amongst many adversaries, 1 Cor. xvi. 9 Oh if it were so with us? we needed not fear all that adversaries can do against the gospel. But we have it to regret, that tho' God hath outwardly restrained adversaries, yet a great and effectual door is not opened to us : Still the door is strait both for ministers and people : God's Spirit is greatly restrained in our day. If it be asked, When it is that a wide or effectual door is opened?

Ans. It is only when the Spirit of God is poured out in a plentiful way, both on ministers and people. When God's Spirit was thus poured out after Christ's ascension, then both the graces and the gifts of the Spirit were communicated in a plentiful measure. Then ministers had great light of knowledge and understanding, as well as the heat of zeal and love. It was easy for them to study and preach, they had clear uptakings of the matters of God, and a great readiness and liberty of expression. Their hearts were enlarged, their minds enlightened, their memories were strengthened, and they had a door of utterance opened, *i. e.* A great facility in declaring of their minds; they were no way straitned for proper matter or fit words; their hearts *indited* goodly things, and their tongues were *as the pen of a ready writer*. Thus it is still, when the Spirit of God is remarkably poured out : then the preaching of the gospel is both pleasant and powerful; ministers hearts are warmed, and peoples hearts are melted? ministers mouths are opened, and peoples appetites enlarged. There is

such a thing as the Spirit of God, his striving with the hearts and consciences of hearers, in and by the word, Gen. vi. 3. And when he thus strives, it makes an effectual door, and a special season of salvation. When the Spirit moves the waters of the sanctuary, people should not neglect then to step in, and be healed. Take heed you do not slight the strivings of God's Spirit with you, in any measure, lest you provoke God to pass such a dreadful sentence against you, as that Gen. vi. 3. *My Spirit shall no longer strive with you.* And if you lose the precious season of the Spirit's striving, you perhaps will never recover it again.

Quest. When is it that the Spirit of God strives with sinners, in and by the gospel?

Ans 1st, When he opens the eyes, and gives the man a discovery of his sinful and miserable state by nature, and of the evil, harmfulness and danger of his sins; and so rivets and fastens conviction on the heart and conscience, that the arrows of the threatnings do stick, and the man is brought to thoughtfulness and anxiety about his future state; and hence is made to cry, *What shall I do to be saved?* O! that is a season which ought to be carefully improven.

2^{dly}, The Spirit strives, by making a man wholly dissatisfied with his present state, and all his earthly enjoyments, as long as he is in the dark about his soul's salvation. Tho' he may be in outward prosperity, he says, *All these things avail me nothing*, while I am ready to be swallowed up by the wrath of God for sin; surely there is no living, no abiding in this state I am in. I am shut up in the prison of unbelief, and the house is all on fire about my ears. I must break prison, and make my escape, otherwise I am undone for ever.

3^{dly}, By making the man despair of help and deliverance by any thing in himself. Oh, saith he, I am a poor, miserable helpless creature! Neither my doing, nor suffering, can free me from wrath. I know no course, nor contrivance of my own that can relieve

me. My relief must certainly come from another airth; for I can never work it for myself.

4thly, By humbling the man to the dust for sin, particularly for mispending time, neglecting prayer, misimproving sermons, profaning sabbaths and sacraments, &c. O! says he, is there any creature more vile than I? Surely there is no toad more loathsome, no carrion more offensive, no puddle more unclean than my soul before God. Can ever the arms of mercy open to embrace such a monster of sin as I have been? This is a choice season, which should be well improven.

5thly, By giving some light into the understanding, concerning the remedy provided for lost sinners. The soul begins, by the word, to discover something of the fulness and ability of Christ, as a Saviour; so that it is made to think there is hope in Israel concerning this matter: My case, says the sinner, is not so bad as the devils, for whom no remedy was ever provided.

6thly, By working some purposes and inclinations in the will toward the offered remedy; so that the soul makes its aims towards Christ: Yea, is content to take any course for an interest in him. And therefore says oft with Paul, Acts ix. 6. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* What method shall I take to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness?

7thly, By determining the soul to a conscientious and diligent use of the means for getting Christ, and salvation through him.

8thly, By making a stir and commotion among the affections, and exciting earnest and passionate desires after Christ and salvation thro' him: So that the soul is made to say, *O that I knew where I might find him! O! when wilt thou come unto me?* I'll spare no pains to get a meeting with him, I'll seek him thro' the streets and broad ways, and all the lanes of the city, crying, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"

Now when the Spirit strives with any of you, in any measure, it is a precious season of grace, that should be carefully observed and improved.

III. The third thing in my general method is to shew, how these seasons of grace ought to be improved by us.

1st, By highly valuing and admiring the distinguishing goodness of God, in affording us such days of grace and salvation. He deals not so with other nations. Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, and Papiſts, have not the gospel-light, and offers of grace which you have. Be thankful to God, especially you that have more special and remarkable seasons beyond others: You that have health and strength, and youth on your side; you that have the Spirit of God striving with you in the ordinances, your eyes opened, hearts melted, consciences awakened, affections moved; O bless God for his distinguishing mercies.

2^{dly}, By believing firmly what Christ saith to you by the word, and attending carefully to it. Why? It is the word of the living God, more true, certain and immoveable than the foundations of the earth: Nay, heaven and earth both will sooner pass away, than one jot or one tittle of his word fall to the ground. Let your ears then be stopped against all the calls and solicitations of sin, Satan, and the world: and open only to precious Christ, saying with the Psalmist, *I will hear what God the Lord will speak.*

3^{dly}, By applying closely to yourselves what Christ saith, and meditating on it afterwards. When you hear any sin threatned you are guilty of, or any duty pressed that you neglect; bring that word close home to your hearts, and say, This word is to me, let me not forget it. O let it abide with me when I go home, when I eat and drink, when I ly down and rise up, when I go out and come in. Still think, you hear Christ's word sounding in your ears, and that you hear him crying, *Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the*

dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Open the door of thy heart, and let me in. “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Why do you weary my patience, and let me stand so long neglected, “till my head is wet with the dew, and my locks “with the drops of the night?”

4thly, By labouring to give kindly entertainment to the Word, and the motions of Christ’s Spirit on thy soul, presently striking in with convictions, submitting to reproofs, and hearkening to his counsels, saying with Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant “heareth.” Say not to the Spirit’s motions and strivings with thee, as Felix did to Paul, *Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* No, no, but forthwith give ear, yield and comply with the Spirit’s strivings, and Christ’s voice: Be content immediately to have thy sores launced, and thy wounds searched to the bottom; and when conviction and soul-trouble for sin is begun, go not to stifle or quench it, or seek hastily to pluck God’s arrows out of thy conscience; but cherish and entertain the work of God’s Spirit, by meditating on thy sin, considering thy lost estate by nature, thy insufficiency to help thyself, together with the excellency and suitableness of the remedy which God has provided:

5thly, By frequent and fervent application to the throne of grace, begging for Christ’s sake, that God may both begin and finish his work in the soul. Acknowledge that you are able of yourselves to do nothing, and that it is by his grace only you can be saved; and when he begins by conviction, be thankful to him, and intreat, that these sparks kindled by the breath of God, may not be smothered, but blown up into a flame: And still remember that the work is God’s, tho’ it be your duty to be casting on fuel by prayer and meditation; yet the sparks that kindle the fire may come from God’s altar; the breath that

blows it comes from heaven. Pray therefore, that the fire may come down, even a live-coal from the altar, and that heaven's wind may blow on thy soul. Cry with the spouse, "Awake, O North-wind, and "come thou South, blow upon my garden. that the "spices thereof may flow out." Let the North-winds of the law come, and convince, and awaken; and the South-winds of the gospel come, and refresh, and comfort. Be earnest, O convinced sinner, in deprecating God's taking away his Spirit from you; make it a part of your daily prayer, to cry with the Psalmist, Psal. li. 11. "Lord, take not thy holy Spirit "from me." Lord forbid the new creature be stifled in the womb. O do thou quicken and preserve it. Let these convictions terminate in my conversion here, and salvation hereafter. Lord! thou art a rock, thy work is perfect; hast thou begun, and wilt thou not also make an end? O! suffer not these tender fruits to be nipped in the bud, or blasted in the blossom, either by Satan's frosty winds, or the world's chilling blasts: But, O! preserve them to maturity, to the praise and glory of thy grace.

IV. The next thing is, the reasons of the Doctrine: why we should so carefully improve our season of grace.

1st, Because God looks for it, and expects it at our hand. When God plants trees in his vineyard, waters and takes pains on them, he looks for fruit from them, Luke xiii. We see what the Lord says of Judah, Isa v. 1, 2. "My well-beloved (i. e. Christ) "hath a vineyard (i. e. the church of the Jews) in a "very fruitful hill: (i. e. a good soil, furnished with "all possible means to make it fruitful :) And he "fenced it, (i. e. protected it by his providence, "from the incursion of enemies,) he gathered out "the stones thereof, (i. e. removed out of it what- "ever was noxious or hurtful, perhaps the idol-gods,

“ put these out of the land,) he planted it with the
 “ choicest vine: (i. e. with pure ordinances, and
 “ institutions of worship, good government and discipline :) He built a tower in the midst of it, (i. e.
 “ for its defence, viz. the strong city of Jerusalem
 “ in midst of the land, which was built as a city
 “ compact together, whither the tribes went up for
 “ worship.) Also he made a wine-press therein:
 “ (i. e. the temple and altar continually running
 “ with the blood of the sacrifices.) Now after all
 it is said, *He looked that it should bring forth grapes:*
 which doth not import that God was uncertain of
 the event; but denotes what is just and equal, and
 what in such cases ought to be. Surely a vineyard
 so attended and furnished, ought to bring forth fruit,
 answerable to all the acts of God’s care and grace
 towards it.

And to bring the matter home to our case, God
 hath been at special care to plant a vineyard in this
 land: We have a good soil, well fenced, the stones
 gather’d out, idolatry and superstition removed, a
 choice vine planted, pure ordinances set up, enemies
 disabled that laid it waste. God has built towers,
 and made wine-presses to us, viz. the sacraments,
 and especially the Lord’s Supper, where the Blood of
 Christ, our great sacrifice, doth run plentifully to us,
 for pardon, healing and washing. Now, doth not
 God look for grapes? Is it not just that we should
 bring forth fruit, answerable to all these privileges?
 Alas! for the most part, there is nothing but wild
 grapes with us; little suitable fruit of our solemn
 communion-days. You may see, what is the result
 of frustrating the divine expectations, Isa. v. 5, 6.
 Nothing but blasting, withering, ruin and desolation.

2dly, Because of the shortness and uncertainty of
 the season of grace: None can tell how long it will
 last. You cannot promise it will continue as long as
 your lives (tho’ even these be most uncertain :) No;

your special season and day of grace may end this very day, or at this Communion-occasion, tho' you should happen to live many years after this. It is likely God is saying to some hearing me, "To-day, hearken to my voice, repent, and close with Christ my Son, or be henceforth hardened and undone for ever." O sinner, this night thy day of grace may cease; God may this day cause some of your hearts to warm by the word, others to tremble, others to mourn, others to purpose and resolve. Well, if you do not lay hold on, and improve this season, and hearken to Christ's voice, you may never get the like occasion again; nay, even tho' you should wish for it. Christ saith, Luke xvii. 22. *The time shall come, when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and shall not see it.* This may be one of the days of the Son of man to you; for now Christ is offering himself, and pressing salvation on you, and striving by his Spirit (I hope) with some of you. Well, if you neglect to open your hearts to Christ this day, God may set a seal on them to morrow, that they shall never be opened. You may afterwards desire another of such days as this; you may wish for one of the offers of that Saviour, for one drop of that blood you slighted, for one knock of his Spirit at the door of your heart, which formerly you neglected; for one of his motions or strivings with you; and yet it may never be granted. With some the day of grace is longer, with others shorter; with some it ends in childhood, with others it ends in youth: and with some few it lasts to old age: But, O sinner! thou hast no reason to expect the continuance of it a moment after this day.

3dly, Because if you do not improve your day of grace, you lose your souls. You may compare the text with verse 11. of the chapter; *Because they hardened their hearts*, and would not hear his voice, in their day of grace, it is subjoined, *I swear in my wrath,*

they shall not enter into my rest. We see the sad case Jerusalem was in when they lost their day of grace. Luke xix. 41, 42 "When he was near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." Here it is said, *Christ wept*, (orig. *Ecclause*) which denotes a weeping with lamentation. *He wept bitterly*, to let you all know what a sad and deplorable thing it is, for a people, city or person to lose their day of grace. The words he speaks are uttered in a weeping strain. Abrupt expressions come now and then from his mouth; he drops now a word, and then a tear; he would speak, but his weeping stops his voice, *If thou hadst known, even thou. Thou, is reduplicate; or twice exprest, Thou, even thou.* As if he had said, "Thou ancient city, the city of David, thou seat of the temple, and of the sacrifices: *O if thou hadst known.* Then he adds, *at least in this thy day.* They had enjoyed many lesser days of grace, when they had faithful prophets dealing with them; these they persecuted and despised, and so lost these days: But these were but lesser days, which did not finally determine the state of that city; for they were to have another day, which is here called, *this their day*, i. e. the day wherein the Son of God was to come among them, and preach the gospel to them, *three years and an half*: That was a special day of grace, and the day that determined their state; for since they did not improve it, *the things of their peace were hid from their eyes.* God would deal no more with them, but left them to destruction. O sinner! O communicants! so will it fare with you, if you let your day of grace go over: Night will come on, wherein none can work, you will stumble in the dark, and fall headlong into the pit for ever.

4thly, Because God keeps a strict account of every hour and minute of your day of grace, that you trifle away; for he reckons it very precious, whatever you think of it. When God lights the candle of the gospel, he expects you should work by it; and he will not suffer this precious candle to burn without observation; nay, he counts every hour and minute it burns, and every hour and minute his Spirit strives, and will make you reckon for them at last. God takes not such strict notice of times of darkness and ignorance; for it is said, he winks at sinners living under them, Acts xvii. 30. i. e. He doth not so narrowly mark their diligence; but when he sends times of light, and of his Spirit's striving with sinners, he will not wink at one hour or minute, but exactly set down every sermon you hear, every communion you see, every call, every intreaty, every threatening, every reproof, every conviction and warning you get, whether by ordinances or providences, whether by conscience or by his Spirit. And, O! what a dreadful libel will these make up against you at the great day, if you neglect your day of grace?

A P P L I C A T I O N.

Use I. For Information. We may hence see, that it is not the bare enjoyment of the gospel, and communion-seasons that will make us happy, but the right improvement of the day of grace, which we enjoy therein.

Use II. For Lamentation. We may hence take occasion to bewail the sad case of many that neglect and lose the day of their merciful visitation. It is said, Jer. viii. 7. "The stork knoweth her appointed times, the turtle, the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming, &c." And we are bid go learn of the ant, Prov. vi. 6. *that provides her meat in summer, and gathers her food in harvest, while the*

weather is good and dry, and food may be had. So that we see the brutes and silly insects observe their seasons. But, alas! many men neglect and forget theirs: they let their summer and harvest-days pass, without making any provision for eternity. Oh! how many among us may take up that sad lamentation, Jer. viii. 20. *Our harvest is past, our summer is ended, and we are not saved!* O that we could weep over many, as Christ did over Jerusalem, for losing their day of grace!

Quest. Who are these that thus lose their day of grace?

Ans. It is hard to be very particular on this head; I shall only give some general characters of such persons.

1st, These who have sat many years under pure and powerful ordinances, and were never affected thereby; but still remain dead and hardened under the most awakening calls and plainest reproofs. These seem to be given over to ruin, Prov. xxix. 1. "He that being often reprov'd, hardneth his neck, shall be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy."

2dly, These who have had many secret motions and operations of the Spirit on their souls, to no effect; many purposes and resolutions to good, and all evanished; many of the Spirit's strivings, and all resisted: These are likely to be given over, Ezek. xxiv. 13. "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." When God's Spirit offered to cleanse that people from their sin, they, like Lot's wife, still hankerd after it, and would not part therewith.

3dly, These who have greatly grieved the Spirit of God, by venturing on sin against the light of their consciences, and the Spirit's motions, and so are turn'd wilful and resolute in sinning: such have the symp-

toims of rejeſtion, Hoſ. iv. 17. *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.*

4thly, Theſe who are ſo forward and bent upon a ſinful courſe, that they can endure no reproof or controul therein, but hate them in their hearts, who ſeek to reclaim them: Theſe have the ſymptoms of ruin upon them, Prov. xv. 10. Amos v. 10.

5thly, When perſons are ſo far hardened in ſin, that God ceaſeth to be a reprover to them, and ſtrikes their conſciences ſo dumb and ſenſeleſs, that they do not accuſe nor challenge them: It is a ſad ſign of up-giving, Ezek. iii. 26. Hoſ. iv. 17.

6thly, When repentance is hid from people's eyes, ſo that they are not affected with the view of their ſins, when they are laid before them: no diſpenſation of providence, no token of God's anger, neither judgments nor mercies, rods nor threatnings; nay the flames of hell ſaſhed in the ſinner's face, do not breed any remorse in their conſciences nor relenting in their hearts for ſin: When people arrive at this height, it is a ſad ſign that they are given up to wrath, Iſa. xlii. 25. Jer. v. 3.

III. Next uſe ſhall be of Examination. O try, if ye have improven your day of grace, ſo as to hearken to Chriſt's voice, and comply with his gracious offers. O communicants, it is highly your intereſt to know this, that you may come with chearfulneſs, and feaſt with your Redeemer at his table. Now try it by theſe marks.

1ſt, Had you ever the experience of Chriſt's Spirit's work in opening your ear, and inclining your heart to cloſe with his offers in the goſpel? Do you experimentally know the heinouſneſs and multitude of your ſins? Do you know ſomething of the terribleneſs of God's wrath due to you for theſe ſins? Have you ſeen your ſoul's need of Chriſt, as a man purſued for his life ſeeth his need of a city of refuge? Have you ſeen yourſelves loſt and dead men, if you get not into C

Have you felt ardent desires after Christ, and been made to say, *Give us Christ, or else we die?* Have you been content to take this lovely Saviour on any terms, to part with all for this Pearl of price, and to count all but loss and dung, to be found in him?

2dly, Can you say, that Christ's word and ordinances where you first heard his voice speaking to you, are still precious and lovely to you for his sake? And hence you are made sometimes to cry out with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Sweet sermons, sweet communion-days, lovely occasions, when the Bridegroom's voice is to be heard.

3dly, Are you fill'd with low thoughts of yourselves, and all your own doings and performances, and with high thoughts of Christ and his righteousness! And do you turn out all Christ's rivals out of your hearts; and undervalue the world and all things in it besides him, who is *the chiefest among ten thousands, and fairer than the sons of men*.

4thly, Do you find a great alteration, and gracious change on your souls, since the time you heard his voice? Doth Christ sit as a refiner with you, changing both heart and life to the better? Are *all old things past away*, old lusts, old thoughts, old desires, old customs, old ways? And are all things with you become new? You that formerly set light by Christ and his voice, and admired the world and its flattering pleasures, and said of Christ, *What is thy beloved, more than another beloved?* Do you now value him, seek nearness to him in duties, enquire for him in ordinances, yea, meditate on him in the night watches; and, when ye awake, do you find your hearts with him? And is sin that displeaseth him your greatest terror? Then surely you are among that blest company that have heard your Redeemer's voice in your day of grace, and you may come with joy to his table.

IV. Use of Exhortation. And here I exhort you all, in the name of Christ, to improve your season of grace. *To-day, while it is called to-day, O hear his voice*; and to-morrow when he invites, *O come unto his table*. Hearers of the gospel, *This is now the accepted time, this is the day of salvation*. What do you resolve to do? Christ is now come to cry and lift up his voice to this whole congregation; to try you once more if you will hear his voice, before your day of grace end. Well, his voice is to you all, I know none of you excluded, if you do not exclude yourselves.

1st, O carnal earthly-minded soul, that has been a drudge to the world, and a stranger to Christ all thy days, his voice is to you this day: O come hear his voice, and close a bargain with him, it will be the best bargain ever you made.

2^{dly}, O profane sinner, drunkard, swearer, liar, sabbath-breaker, whoremonger; sinner as black as hell, hearken to Christ's voice this day, and come and be saved from thy sins: Why will you stop your ears, and chuse to die in your sins?

3^{dly}, O hard-hearted sinner, that never wast affected all thy life for the sinfulness and misery of thy natural estate, that never had a sore heart for offending God, that never mourned for one sin, Christ's voice is this day to thee, Isa. xlv. 12. *Hearken unto me, ye stout hearted, that are far from righteousness*.

4^{thly}, O prayerless sinner, that never bowed a knee in secret, to cry for pardon of sin, and an interest in Jesus Christ, to save thee from the wrath to come; lend your ear this day, and hearken to Christ's sweet voice, while he calls, *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near*, Isa. lv. 6.

5^{thly}, Condemned rebels in the hands of justice, sentenced to die, and ready to be taken out to execution: O hear Christ's voice this day, and your souls shall live.

6thly, Slaves to sin and Satan, who have many times heard the devil's voice, answered his calls, and complied readily with his temptations: will you hear the Redeemer's voice for once, and comply with his counsels before it be too late. Why will ye shut your ear against the lovely Saviour, and obey the voice of your soul-destroyer?

7thly, Obstinate sinner, that could never hitherto, either by the word or the rod, by ministers or providences, be prevailed upon to leave one of all thy sins, O be persuaded to hear Christ's voice this day, and no longer harden thy heart.

8thly, O gospel-slighter, that has many a day refused Christ's offers, spurned against his bowels, trampled on his blood, crucified him at the communion table: O come, hearken this day to his voice, and he will let you see, that though your case be sad, yet it is not desperate; for *he hath found a ransom.*

9thly, Hypocrites and formalists, that have had a mask of religion, but have all your days been dissembling and dealing deceitfully with God: come deal ingenuously and sincerely with him for once, and hearken to his voice, give him your hearts, as well as your outward man.

10thly, Backsliders, and covenant-breakers, who have broke many a vow, slighted many an engagement, and sinned against many a resolution; O hear Christ's voice this day, when he calls to you. "Turn ye backsliding children," come to me, and I "will heal your backslidings, and love you freely."

11thly, Poor plagued diseased souls, who are groaning under many heart-plagues, and soul-distresses, such as Atheism, pride, hardness, formality, &c. come hearken to Christ's voice, and he will be your Physician.

12thly, "Weary and heavy laden sinners," who are like to sink with the burden of your guilt, come hearken to Christ's voice this day, and he "will give rest to your souls."

13thly, Pursued shelterless sinners, who are afraid of the avenger of blood, hearken to Christ's voice, and flee to the city of refuge. Many motives and arguments might I use with you, to hear the voice of lovely Jesus, while he calls to day.

I. Consider how earnest Christ is to persuade you to hear his voice: he stands at your doors, and knocks both by his word and Spirit; yea, he waits and knocks after many repulses, and affronts, and promises that all former slights and refusals shall be forgiven, if you will yet hearken and close with him. How oft doth he repeat his intreaties, Luke xiii. 34. "How oft would I have gather'd you!" Yea, he weeps for sinners obstinacy, Luke xix. 41. Strange! Doth he gain any thing by your hearkening to his voice? What means this earnestness? It is all, O sinners, on your account. For (1.) He knows better than any the worth of your souls, and that a world cannot redeem them when lost. (2.) He knows well the miserable state of your souls without him; it is most sad and deplorable at present, and will be much more so thro' endless eternity: For if you hear not Christ's voice, you will die in your sins, and be tormented in them for ever. (3.) Christ is so earnest, because he knows the difficulty of winning souls. He knows Satan has great power and interest with souls, to blind, harden, and delude them, and that it is not easy to undeceive them, and pull them out of his grips: and therefore he deals and strives so earnestly with souls to gain them.

II. Take a serious view of the state of your souls: While you stop your ears against Christ's charming voice; it is inexpressibly miserable. For, 1st, Your souls are destitute of all that is good, Eph. ii. 12. You are as poor and wretched creatures as ever God made; you are wit out life, without grace, without peace, without pardon, without comfort, without righteousness, without ransom, without the favour of God, without the most amiable and lovely image of God,

without the Spirit of God, and without all happiness. *2dly*, Your souls are in the possession of Satan, where Christ is shut out, the devil is let in; and where he dwells, there he hath an absolute dominion: he uses all the faculties of the soul as his tools and instruments, Eph. ii. 2. Oh! would not any man reckon it an unspeakable misery, to be in a house shut up with the devil? *3dly*, Where Christ is shut out, the plague of sin doth rage, and its pestilential marks do daily appear; what madness is it then to refuse to hearken to the voice of this blessed cleanser? *4thly*, The fire of God's wrath is kindled there, where Christ is refused; and what distraction is it to shut out Christ, whose blood only can quench this fire? *5thly*, If you do not hearken to Christ, you have no way to prevent eternal destruction; for there is no advocate, no surety to interpose for you, if he be refused. Surely, the thoughts of appearing before an angry God after death, must be terrible to a Christless soul: *For who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can abide with everlasting burnings?* I have read of a certain king of Hungary who was a Christian; and being on a time marvellous sad and heavy, his brother, who was a brisk and gallant man, would needs know what ailed him. "Oh brother, (saith he) I have been a great sinner against God, and I know not how I shall appear before him, when he comes to judgment." His brother answered, These are but melancholly thoughts, and so made light of them, as courtiers use to do. The king replied nothing at that time; but the custom of that country was, (the government thereof being absolute) That if the executioner sounded a trumpet before any man's door, the man was presently to be led to execution. The king in the dead time of the night, sent his executioner, and caused him sound his trumpet before his brother's door, who hearing and seeing the messenger of death, ran quickly and sprang in trembling into his brother's presence, falls down on his

knees, and beseeches the king to let him know wherein he had offended him. "O brother, (answered the king) you never offended me, but loved me: And (said he) is the sight of an earthly executioner so terrible to thee; and shall not I, who am so great a sinner, fear much more to be brought to the judgment-seat of an angry God?" What soul can think on this without terror, that hath not hearkened to Christ's voice in the gospel?

III. If you do not hearken to Christ's voice in the gospel, it had been better for you never to have heard the gospel at all: for your guilt is dreadfully aggravated hereby, and your misery will be the greater, both here and hereafter. We may gather this from Rev. vi. where after the white horse, (i. e. Christ with the gospel neglected) comes the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, and the pale horse of pestilence. Neglecting to hear Christ in the gospel ushers in all outward miseries like a flood. Jer. vi. 8. "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." Then again, how sad will your case be at a tribunal, and thro' all eternity? The devils, the Turks, the heathens, and your own consciences, will bitterly upbraid you in hell, for refusing to hear Christ's voice in the gospel.

IV. Christ will not hear your cries in the time of misery, if you neglect his voice in the time of mercy. Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. Now Christ's voice is sweet, and full of mercy, but remember, O gospel-slighters, the time is at hand, when you will hear Christ speaking in another tone; no more *open to me*, and *hearken to my voice*, poor soul: but *depart from me*, ye cursed, *into everlasting fire*, &c.

V. This may be the last season you will hear Christ's voice speaking to you; this may be the last Communion and the last call that Christ intends to give you. This

may be the last day of grace, and the last time that his Spirit will strive with you. If you stop your ear, or harden your heart this day, there may follow an eternal dead silence, and God's Spirit never strive any more with you, and so your day of grace is lost, and your soul lost for ever. O young folk, what say ye to it? A season of youth is an accepted time, and a day of salvation: for the Lord's sake do not lose it. You have now plenty of sermons, sacraments, and gospel-offers; you have Christ crucified set before your eyes to affect your hearts, and bring you to a compliance with his calls. You have also loud warnings this day from God's providence, and (I hope) some of you the inward workings of God's Spirit on your consciences, concurring with these outward means. Well then, give kindly entertainment to Christ's voice in this season of grace; while he yet stands beseeching you, come hearken to his voice, and accept of him for your Surety; enter into covenant with him this night, and come to his table, and seal it to-morrow. O sinner, turn your back on the devil, leave your sins, and stop your course, and come and be reconciled to God thro' this peace-maker, who is standing waiting to be employed. Well, what answer shall I carry back to my Master, that sent me to deal with you for this end? Shall I go and complain? "Lord, They are a company of obstinate sinners thou sent'st me to; I intreated them to hearken to thy voice, and leave their sins; but there was no concern, no fear, no sense of sin among them. Had I been to preach to beasts, stocks, or stones, they would have been as much moved as they. Alas! I have spent my strength in vain, my voice and lungs for nought; I thought thy sweet intreaties and charming voice would have melted their hearts, but neither comforts nor terrors had any effect."

Or shall I have ground to say? "Lord, I have offered sinners a Redeemer, and entreated them to

close with him. Though they stood long out against thy threatnings, yet when they heard thy entreaties, their hearts began to relent, some began to sigh, others to weep, others to long after Christ; and I hope they are gone home to make a personal covenant with him this night, and sincerely design to return and seal it to-morrow." God grant this may be the event. *Amen.*



S E R M O N IV.

A SERMON after the COMMUNION.

The Believer's Dignity in being an Heir of God.

GAL. iv. 7.

Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

IN this chapter the apostle doth hold forth the happy state of believing Gentiles under New-Testament-times; that it is ever preferable to that of the believing Jews under the Old Testament. The Jewish church he compares to a child in minority, that is under tutors and governors, and is acquainted only with the first rudiments of religion; and likewise to the state of a servant, that is still kept under subjection and bondage: for that church was always in a servile condition, having been under the heavy yoke of a great many ceremonial rites and observances.

But our blessed Lord Jesus, by his coming into the world, hath broke off that yoke from his people's necks, and hath brought them under a more spiritual and agreeable dispensation; yea, he hath sent forth his Spirit into their hearts. Upon which account the apostle concludes them to be happy, yea, even children of God, *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, &c.*

In the text we have the happy state of the believing Galatians briefly represented. *1st, Negatively, Thou art no more a servant*; i. e. no more in a state of servile subjection to the law, and to the Mosaic rites and observations. *2dly, Positively, Thou art a son*! i. e. Thou hast attained to a more excellent state of liberty, like to that of sons who have come to ripe age. *1st* means not that believers under the Old Testament had not that privilege of being children of God; no, believers then were really sons, but kept in such a state, and trained up under such harsh discipline, that they seemed more like servants than sons. But (saith he) to you believers under the New Testament the discipline is changed, and you have attained to more honourable son-like treatment. *3dly, We have an inference from this privilege of son-ship, And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* Among men only the eldest son is heir, but all God's children are heirs.

In which we have two things, *1st, The high dignity and preferment of God's children*; they are heirs of God, i. e. They have a free right and title to eternal life, and all the gifts and blessings of God; yea, to the infinite God himself, who is the believer's chief good and portion. *2dly, The way of obtaining this dignity and happiness, through Christ, and the merit of his blood*: He is God's eternal Son, and heir of all things, and being our surety, he, by his obedience and sufferings, hath purchased a title to believers, to be God's sons by adoption, and joint heirs with him of the heavenly inheritance: *He is our elder*

brother, and is not ashamed to call us brethren. The inheritance is his by nature, but ours by grace.

From the words thus explained, observe,

I. That the privileges of believers under the New Testament, do exceed these who lived under the Old. The legal state was more servile, but the gospel state is more filial.

II. That tho' God hath one Son only by eternal generation, viz. our Lord Jesus Christ; yet he hath many sons by grace and adoption, viz. Believers.

III. That these who have the Spirit of God dwelling in their hearts, and exciting them to prayer, have a good evidence of their son-ship, and filial relation to God. This is clear, from the connection of this verse with the preceeding

IV. The doctrine that I am to insist on at this time, is, *That it is the great honour and privilege of all true believers, to be the children and heirs of God thro' Jesus Christ.*

This is confirmed from that parallel text, Rom. viii. 16, 17.

The method for handling this subject, shall be, (1.) To enquire in what sense believers are the children of God. (2.) In what respect they are called heirs. (3.) What is the heritage they are intitled to. (4.) How it is they attain to this privilege. (5.) To shew the wonderful free grace of God, in granting such a glorious privilege to believers, as to be his children and heirs. (6.) Make improvement of the whole.

I. As to the first, In what sense believers are the children of God.

1st, Negatively, It is not to be meant here, that they are his children only, (1.) In respect of creation, for so all men are God's children, Mal. ii. 10. *Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Had believers no further interest in God than this,*

they should have but little comfort; for in this sense God is also Father to the devils and wicked men, for he made them; but *he that made them will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them will shew them no favour.* Nor (2.) Is it to be meant, that they are his children only by providence; for so he is to all, Deut. xxxii. 6. *Is he not thy Father that bought thee? i. e. hath redeemed thee from slavery, and conferred great blessings on thee.* Nor (3.) Is it to be understood of their being his children by profession, or external covenant-engagements; for so all the members of the visible church are, Isa. i. 2.

2dly, *Positively*, Believers are the children of God, by way of special grace, and that in these several respects, (1) In respect of *election*, God has chosen and predestinated them from eternity to be his children and heirs, upon whom he will entail the kingdom of heaven, Eph. i. 5. Jam. ii. 5. (2.) In respect of *regeneration*, he dignifies them with a new birth, working a gracious change upon them, infusing in them a supernatural principle of holiness, whereby they become like their heavenly Father, and so they are said to be *begotten and born of God*, Jam. i. 18. 1 John iii. 9. (3.) They are his children by *adoption*; which is an act of God's free grace, whereby he assumes those into the number of his children, who were not so naturally, but were strangers and aliens: Yea, he takes these who were enemies, and of the family of hell, into the family of heaven; and graciously entitles them to all the advantages, dignities and privileges of children. As for instance, 1st, He educates, brings them up, and makes provision for them, as for sons, Isa. xlv. 3. Matth. vi. 32. Psal. lxxxiv. 11. 2dly, He allows them a share in his fatherly love and compassion, together with the protection and attendance of sons, Jer xxxi. 20. Heb. i. 14. 3dly, He frees them from a servile state, or any base and drudgery work, and endues them with a free spirit, Rom. viii. 15. —

4thly, They have the chastisement of sons, which is most needful, Deut. viii. 5. Heb. xii. 6, 7, 8. —

5thly, He allows them free access to, and a filial confidence with him in prayer; hence in the verse preceeding my text, the apostle saith, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father." And *Lastly*, He entitles them to the inheritance of sons, as in the text, *If sons, then heirs of God.* And this leads to,

II. The second head, viz. *In what respect believers are called heirs.* And for the better illustration hereof, I shall shew wherein temporal and spiritual heirs do agree, and wherein they differ.

I. They agree, and resemble one another in these things:

1st, He that is an heir of an estate, hath his title freely conveyed to him: he pays not for it, because he has it by birth. So believers, who are spiritual heirs, have the title to their inheritance freely; and as they have nothing to pay for it, so it is given to them *without money, and without price.* And tho' they have not a title to it by their natural birth, yet by their new birth, they become the sons of God, and heirs of heaven.

2dly, They who are rightful heirs of an estate, have the surest title of any other, because it is built upon nature: A father may frown upon his son and heir for his faults, but doth not easily disinherit him; nor will he turn him out of doors as he doth a servant for his offence. So believers who are God's adopted children and heirs, have a most sure title to the heavenly inheritance. Tho' God may chastise them, yet he will not disinherit them; Psal. lxxxix. 32, 33, 34. "I will visit their transgressions with the rod: —
"Nevertheless my loving-kindness I will not take
"utterly from him.—My covenant will I not break,
"nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."—
Our title to the inheritance by the second covenant,

is far surer than Adam's was by the first: for when he offended, God treated him as a servant, and turned him out of doors: But the believer who is become a child and heir by Jesus Christ, is better secured by the second covenant; for he hath not only God's word, God's writ, and God's oath to confirm it, but he hath the Mediator's blood sealing his charter, and an earnest of the inheritance already given him, viz. God's Spirit put into his heart, 2 Cor. i. 22. So that his right and title is indefeasible, and can never be altered.

3dly, An heir's title to an inheritance is reckoned more honourable than his, who obtains it another way. So the believer's title is most honourable, being made heirs of God, and co-heirs with his own Son Jesus Christ, Rom. viii. 17. Christ alone is the natural Son, and hath the primary right to the inheritance, but believers by adoption, are assigned to a share, and made co-heirs with him. So that Christ and believers do, as it were, divide heaven betwixt them; they have the same Father, dwell in the same house, sit at the same table, reign on the same throne, partake of the same glory. O! what honour is this, which is put on worms of the earth? John xvii. 22,—24. John xx. 17. Rev. iii. 21. Christ indeed being our elder brother, his inheritance is double, and his power and glory is far greater than the glorified saints and angels, *inasmuch as he hath, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they*, Heb. i. 4. Eph. i. 22.

4thly, An heir, during his minority, hath not the actual possession of his inheritance, as being incapable to manage it, and therefore hath tutors and curators appointed him; so a believer, though an heir of heaven, hath not the possession of the inheritance, while here. This life is the time of his minority, and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are his tutors and curators, until he arrive at ripe age, and the years of his majority, when he will be fully *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*; and then he enters upon

the immediate possession of all that is promised to him.

5thly, An heir of an estate, though he want the possession for a time, yet he hath a present maintenance allowed him out of it, suitable to his station and circumstances; so believers, during their minority in this world, have a sufficient maintenance granted them, out of that great inheritance promised to, and provided for them. As for temporal things, they have a competency secured to them while here; *Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure.* And for spiritual things, they shall have as much grace, strength, comfort and joy, as will bear their charges, until the time appointed come, when they shall enter upon the full possession of all.

6thly, An heir of a good estate may be somewhat straitned in his circumstances for a time, because of burdens on the estate, or some necessary restrictions laid upon him; yet he comforts himself with the hopes of a plentiful estate at length: So the heirs of promise may be under many straits and difficulties while here, under burdens of corruption, fears of wrath, and hidings of God's face. They oft complain of little grace, weak faith, languishing desires, and of faint discoveries of God and Christ, and the invisible things of the other world: Yet nevertheless they should not murmur, but encourage themselves in the faithful promise, and sure right they have obtained in Christ; and be thankful, if as much be allowed them out of the inheritance, as will bear their charges to heaven, where they shall be supplied to the full, forget all their straits, and remember their poverty no more.

7thly, An heir, whatever his present straits and circumstances be, is a respectful and honourable person; and they who know what he is born to, and what his expectations are, do put respect upon him: so believers however mean and straitned they be, during their minority in this world, are very honourable persons, *the excellent ones in the earth*, and, in many respects,

more excellent than their neighbours ; they are heirs of a great inheritance, and upon this account, should be honoured by these among whom they live ; for tho' they make no great outward appearance at present, yet, in a little, they shall be crowned with glory and honour.

II. Temporal and spiritual heirs do differ in these things :

1st, Temporal heirs, however rich they be, are only heirs of a corruptible spot of earth ; but believers are heirs of an *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them*. And what is earth to heaven ?

2^{dly}, Many heirs, here on earth, never come to the actual possession of their estates ; for they may be squandered away, or lost by the ill management of their parents or tutors ; or they may be taken from them by oppression or violence ; and oftentimes death comes and snatches away the young heirs before they attain to ripe age ; so that they never win to the possession. But heaven's heirs will all certainly get possession of their inheritance ; their tutors will not lose nor mismanage it to them ; no enemy can seize it by violence ; nor *thief break through and steal*. And death will be so far from depriving them of the possession of their inheritance, that it brings them to the immediate and full fruition thereof, through a glorious eternity.

3^{dly}, A temporal heir doth not fully possess the heritage till the father dies ; but the spiritual heir doth possess it fully in his Father's life-time. Our eternal Father lives for ever ; and this doth not hinder the heirs possessing : What a mystery is here ! In temporal heritages the father dies to give place to the son : but here the Son dies to bring the heirs of heaven to live and possess with the Father.

4^{thly}, When a temporal heir comes to the possession, he can enjoy the inheritance but a short while ; for death soon comes and dispossesses him. But the spiri-

tual heir, when he gets possession of his inheritance, becomes immortal, and is for ever out of the reach of death.

III. The third head in the method was, to shew what the heritage is, which God's children and heirs are entitled to; surely it is the greatest and largest that ever was: *All things are yours*, 1 Cor. iii. 21. More particularly,

1st, The earth is their inheritance, Matth. v. 5. though commonly they possess little of it, yet they have a covenant-right to make use of the good creatures, and the outward support and refreshments of life. The men of this world, though they have a general providential right to such things of the earth as they possess, yet they have no covenant-title thereto, as believers have: Their enjoyments come not to them from God as a loving Father, or as a God in covenant with them, to promote their souls good: They have not the comfortable and sanctified enjoyment of the creature; no, this comes only to us in Christ, and is a part of the believer's portion. By the fall, Adam and his posterity were disinherited, they lost their covenant-right over the creatures, with the sanctified use thereof. But in Christ, who is the heir of all things, the title is renewed to believers, and they become heirs of the world: and whatever part of it falls to their share, they may look on it as a blessing of the covenant, a legacy from Christ, a part of his purchase, sanctified for their use, and designed for their good.

2^{dly}, Heaven is their heritage, however poor they be in this world, yet they are heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him, James ii. 5. The heirs of this celestial crown are like princes in disguise, travelling in a foreign country: strangers that know them not, look only to their outward appearance; and are apt to think them poor and miserable: but their hopes and happiness lye in things

not seen; they are heirs of the land that is afar off. Sometimes, with Moses, they are allowed to come to the top of Pisgah, to view this promised land, and this is most satisfying: At other times, with Abraham, they are admitted, as it were to walk through it, and hear God say, *All this is thine, all is made over to thee in Christ*; and this fills the heirs of heaven, with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

3dly, In the text, they are called *heirs of God*: God himself is their inheritance, as this is more than, to say, they are heirs of both heaven and earth. *I will be your God*, is the most comprehensive promise in the whole Bible, it imports an interest in all the blessings and promises of the new-covenant, in all the purchase and fulness of Christ, in all the gifts and graces of the holy Spirit, and in all the divine attributes and perfections. When the Lord saith to the heirs of salvation, *I will be your God*; how great is the inheritance he bequeaths to them! It is more than if he made over to them a thousand heavens, or ten thousand worlds; for, saith he, I give thee the omnipotent Jehovah, I make over myself unto you, in all my essential perfections, my Omnipotency shall be your guard, my Omniscience your overseer, my Omnipresence your companion, my Bounty your store, my Wisdom your counsellor, my Justice your rewarder, my Holiness your fountain of grace, my Unchangeableness the rock of your security, my All-sufficiency your inheritance, and my Eternity the date of your happiness. Surely, O believer, the lines are fallen to you in pleasant places, and you have got a goodly heritage.

IV. The fourth head was, to enquire how believers attain to this high privilege, of being children and heirs of God. 1st, It is not from any worth or merit in them, but from the free love and goodness of God, that hath predestinated them to the adoption of children, and chosen them heirs of the kingdom. 2dly, It is by the mediation of Jesus Christ, who was their

surety, interposes for them, when under sentence of death; purchased the inheritance for them by his merits, and left it to them in legacy by his testament, which he sealed and confirmed with his own blood. 3dly, By the application of the Holy Ghost, who is the executor of Christ's testament, and who comes and inhabits believers in the bequeathed inheritance, by renewing their souls, working faith in them, and disposing them to close with the Redeemer; planting all gracious habits in them, and thereby giving them the earnest, and first-fruits of the inheritance.

V. The fifth thing was, to shew the wonderful grace of God, in granting such a glorious privilege to poor believers. If we seriously consider the grace of God in adopting us to be his children and heirs, we may well cry out with the apostle, 1 John iii. 1. *Behold! what manner of love is this the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God?* The wonderfulness of this grace appears in these things;

1st, That he adopts us to be his sons and heirs, when he needed us not. Men adopt sons because they are childless, and need some to propagate their families, keep up their name, and perpetuate their memories: But the eternal Father adopts children and heirs, tho' he hath a natural and eternal Son of his own, who is the *brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, a Son in whom his soul delighteth*: and altho' he could have been infinitely happy without us, and needed no accession to his glory. We stood in need of a father, but he stood not in need of sons.

2dly, That he chuses these to be his sons and heirs, who have nothing to recommend them to him, but are utterly unworthy of this dignity and privilege. Men usually adopt these who are of their kindred, or who are their friends and favourites; but God shews this favour to rebels, enemies, traitors, Satan's slaves, and hell's heirs. Men adopt those in whom they see, or

at least, fancy something of worth: Mordecai adopted Esther because she was fair: But God adopts these who are naturally most vile and unworthy, yea, despicable as worms, loathsome as carcases, deformed as monsters, black as Ethiopians, and diseased as lepers. Having nothing to engage his love, but every thing to provoke his loathing of us.

3dly, That he should be at such charge and cost in adopting us. Men are at no pains about it, but to draw up a writ, and sign or seal it, and then all is done: but infinite wisdom and power must be set on work to make us sons and heirs; an eternity must be spent in contriving the method: the eternal Son of God must die to bring it about, and the charter of our adoption must be sealed with his most precious blood. Never was it heard, that any man let his only son suffer and die, to adopt an enemy; but this the great God hath done, which is the wonder of the redeemed, the wonder of angels, and will be the wonder of eternity.

4thly, That he exalts ~~these~~ whom he adopts to such high dignity and honour; for God to have pardoned his enemies, and delivered them from going to hell, had been much; for him to have taken his enemies, and made them his friends and favourites, had been more: But for God to take his mortal enemies into his bosom, and make them his sons and heirs; yea, beautify them with his image, value them as his jewels, entitle them to his kingdom, and make them co-heirs with his own beloved Son, is such a prodigy of love, as surpasseth all finite comprehension. To have advanced one of the blessed Cherubims or Seraphims, so high, had been a stupenduous act of grace: But to take a lump of polluted dust, a cursed sinner, a wretch as black as hell could make him, and raise him so high, yea above the brightest cherub in glory, is eternally an astonishing wonder of free love.

A P P L I C A T I O N.

I. Use of Information. This doctrine informs us of these things :

1st, Of the wonderful love and goodness of God, to poor elect sinners in Christ : he takes enemies into his family, yea puts them among the children : and not only doth he confer the honour of son-ship on them, but also puts the nature of sons in them ; for they are sons by regeneration, as well as by adoption ; both these are joined together, as is clear from John i. 12, 13. *To them that believe, he gave power to become the sons of God ; who were born not of the will of man, but of God.*

2^{dly}, That believers are of more noble and illustrious descent than any others : they are sons of the most high God. Some talk of their progenitors, and value themselves on their high extract : So the Jews vaunted that they were Abraham's seed, John viii. 33. But surely it is an infinitely greater privilege to be among the sons of God. David thought it no small honour to be son-in-law to the king of Israel, 1 Sam. xviii. 18. And shall any among us reckon it a small thing to be a son to the King of heaven.

3^{dly}, That God is an infinitely rich and bountiful Father, who makes all his children heirs, and that of a great and splendid inheritance : Tho' his family be numerous, yet there is not one of them left unprovided ; for he brings many sons to glory, Heb. ii. 10.

II. Use of Examination. Let us all try what right or claim we have to this honour and privilege, of being the sons and heirs of God.

I. Try, O communicants, if ye have the marks and characters of God's children. 1st, Have you cordially made choice of God as your Father in Christ, and dedicated yourselves to him at this time, in a perpet-

ual covenant, Jer. iii. 19. *How shall I put thee among the children! &c. Thou shalt call me, My Father.*—

2dly, Have ye received the Mediator by a true and lively faith; for it is hereby we become children, John i. 2. *To as many as received him, he gave power to become the sons of God.* Gal. iii. 26. *Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* We can be adopted only by virtue of his right, who is the elder brother, and heir of all things. 3dly, Are you like your Father, have you his image upon you, holiness? 4thly, Do you sincerely love Christ, your elder Brother and Redeemer? John viii. 42. *Jesus said unto them, if God were your Father, ye would love me.* 5thly, Do ye love and esteem all the children of the family, as the excellent of the earth? Psal. xvi. 2. 6thly, Are ye heartily concerned for the interest and welfare of your mother, the church? Psal. cxxxvii. 6. 7thly, Are ye troubled for offending your Father? 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. 8thly, Are you desirous of your Father's presence and company? Psal. xxvi. 8. 9thly, Have ye childrens appetites for your spiritual food? Psal. lxxxiv. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

II. Try if you have the spirit and disposition of heirs. 1st, Is it your main care to make sure your birthright, and title to the inheritance? Many of God's children have not the assurance hereof, but they all labour after it, and are restless without it. Mat. vi. 33. 2dly, If you be heirs, you will highly value your birthright, and not be willing to part with it for a trifle: You will not (like profane Esau, Heb. xi. 16.) sell it for sensual pleasures, and gratifications of the flesh: Nay, your hearts will rise against Satan's solicitations to break with your Father, and sell your birthright, and say with Naboth to Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 3. *The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.* God forbid that I should part with my portion in Christ for worldly gain, carnal satisfactions, or any earthly delight whatsoever.

3dly, Your hearts and thoughts will be much set upon your heritage above, for it is your treasure, and *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" Mat. vi. 21. What do ye most think of, when ye are alone? Nebuchadnezzar, when he is alone, thinks on his large territories, Dan. iv. 29, 30. *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdoms?* &c. So, if you be heirs of heaven, your hearts will be running much thither.

4thly, In time of your difficulties and straits, you will be drawing your comfort and encouragement from the large and goodly heritage, you are entitled to; and likewise you will be looking and waiting when it will fall into your hands; yea, you will be sending messengers and spies to the land of promise to survey it, and bring you good tidings from thence, for your support while in the wilderness: You will be feasting and entertaining yourselves with the thoughts of your rich inheritance, and portion in Christ, and groaning within yourselves, "When shall I be with my Father and elder Brother above? When shall my pilgrimage be finished, and the time of my minority expire, that I may enter upon the possession?" Rom. viii. 23. *We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.*

Lastly, All these who are heirs of heaven do get the seal and earnest of the inheritance put in their hearts, viz. the Spirit of God, 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 13, 14. "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." As an earnest-penny secures our right to a bargain, and is also a part of it; so the sanctifying Spirit, or grace of God in the heart, is a pledge and earnest of the glorious inheritance above. O communicants! have ye got this earnest in your

souls? Are ye beginnaing to reap the first fruits of the inheritance? Surely it will be matter of rejoicing to find it.

Quest. How shall I know if I have got the Spirit in my heart, as the seal and first-fruits of the inheritance?

Ans. By his actings and operations in your souls.
1st, Wherever he is, he is an illuminating Spirit, that lets you see the evil of sin, and the excellency of Christ.
2dly, A humbling Spirit, that brings the soul to ly in the dust, and abhor itself for its abominations. —
3dly, A spirit of prayer, that inclines the soul to come to its Father, for the supply of wants, Gal. iv. 6. —
4thly, A sin-subduing Spirit, that helps to weaken and mortify in-dwelling corruption, Rom. viii. 13 —
5thly, A soul-sanctifying Spirit, that infuses, increases, quickens, and actuates grace in the heart, Eph. iv. 23, 24. Now, wherever these gracious actings and operations of the Spirit are to be found, you may conclude you have got a seal of your heirship, the earnest and first-fruits of the inheritance, as a pledge of your being shortly put in possession of all.

III. Use of Exhortation, to two sorts. *1st*, These who are aliens and foreigners. *2dly*, These who are children, and heirs of God.

I. I shall speak to these who are aliens, have no interest in God's family, nor the childrens privileges; and yet many such have been presuming to eat of the childrens bread, to which they have no right. I intreat you to awake from your security, and consider the misery of your state. O! that God would sound an alarm in your ears.

1st, If you be not God's children, you are dogs; and yet you have been presuming to meddle with the the childrens bread, which is horrid sacrilege.

2dly, You are children of the devil, and of the family of hell; nay, you are Satan's bond-slaves. — There is no medium; either you are God's children,

or the devil's slaves, John viii. 44. And what hath Satan's slaves to do with God's holy things?

3dly, O aliën and foreigner! thou art a child of wrath, an heir of hell; this is thy native heritage and portion; and this sad heritage will remain sure to thee: when thou leavest thy substance to others, this shall go alongst with thyself to another world. *The wrath of God abideth on thee*, both here and eternally: O sinner! wrath is thy constant covering now, and the heavens are growing blacker and blacker every day above thy head. The earth is weary of thee; the pit is opening her mouth for thee; hell is groaning for thee from beneath; and the thread of life, that is keeping thee out of it, is just ready to break. O! waken before it be too late.

4thly, Thou art without God in the world; thou hast no interest in God as thy friend; thou art far from God; he is thy wrathful enemy: Thy hell is begun already; for what makes hell, but exclusion from the presence of God? *Depart from me ye cursed*. Now you are gone from God already, with his curse upon you, like the damned; only your case is not desperate as theirs is: There is some hope of your returning to God again; but there is none of theirs. O! turn then to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.

5thly, By presuming on the Lord's table, you have drawn a new curse on yourselves; for ye have been mocking God, shedding Christ's blood, murdering the blessed Redeemer: You have been acting Judas' part, saying, "Hail Master, and betraying the Son of God with a kiss." O! Satan's slaves, you have been eating Christ's bread, but God's curse was on the morsel you got; and ye have drawn down new soul-plagues on yourselves. You'll be ten-times more Satan's slaves than you were before; for to all your other sins you have added this, of crucifying Christ afresh?

Quest. Is there any hope for such children of wrath and heirs of hell as we are? *What shall we do to be saved?*

Ans. 1st, I say to you, as Peter to Simon Magus, Acts viii. 21, 22. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; thy heart is not right with God: repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God for forgiveness." Repent and weep over a slain Christ, whom you have pierced at his table, and cry, *Lord deliver me from blood-guiltiness.* O can you weep over a dead child, or friend? Can you weep for the loss of world's wealth, and not weep for the loss of your souls, and of your Saviour?

2^{dly}, Retire into some secret place, and there meditate on your misery, while children of Satan, and heirs of wrath: Firmly believe your sad state, your salvation is impossible, while in it. There is a bill of exclusion past in the court of heaven, against all under a covenant of works, which is your case, Gal. iv. 30. *The son of the bond-woman shall not be heir:* heirs of wrath must not be heirs of glory: there is no salvation under this covenant, but on a condition impossible, perfect obedience to the law, and satisfaction to divine justice for the wrong already done. There is no promise in it of pardon, no place for repentance, no accepting of the will for the deed. O poor forlorn soul, put the question to thyself, How shall I live in this case? How shall I die in it? How shall I appear before a just God in it? Surely, a state of wrath is too hot a climate for my soul to live in.

3^{dly}, Cherish convictions when God sends them, go not to run away with God's arrows of conviction sticking in your consciences, to your employments, to work them out; to your cups, to drink them out; to your bed, to sleep them out; to your companions, to sport them away: No, but run with them to the great physician Christ, that he may take them out with his own hand, and apply Gilead's balm to the wound.

Alas! many destroy their immortal souls, by crucifying their convictions.

4thly, Presently embrace the sweet gospel-offers that are made to you; now is the day when the great trumpet is blown, that out-cast perishing sinners may come and accept of the gospel-jubilee, Isa. xxvii. 13. Now liberty is proclaimed to the captives: Now the heirs of wrath may become heirs of glory: And what way is that? even by closing with Christ in a marriage-covenant. Come marry the heir of all things, and you shall be freed from bondage, and heaven shall be your dowry. Come flee presently out of the dominion of the law, into the dominion of grace; and there the law's curses shall not reach you. Accept of Jesus Christ on the terms of grace, and you shall have a great heritage with him, an inheritance that shall last for ever. Worldly heritages do not last; all your riches and honours, profits and pleasures must shortly be buried with you, they cannot accompany you into another world: But if you accept of Christ as your Saviour and Surety, then the eternal God is your God, and portion for ever. O heirs of wrath, what are your hearts saying? Are you content with this bargain? Are you willing to leave Satan's slavery, and become children and heirs of the great King?

5thly, Remember that dreadful vengeance will shortly seize upon them that refuse such a glorious heritage: consider what is abiding you, Psal. xi. 6. *Snares, fire, brimstone, and an horrible tempest shall be the portion of your cup.*

Exhort. II. To those who are sons and heirs of God. I shall speak, in the first place, some things to you all in general.

1st, Has God, of his free mercy and rich grace, made you his sons and heirs, then be humble, and remember what you once were. When God found you, you were children of wrath, even as others. Free love hath picked you out from among the multi-

tude of condemned malefactors, hath commanded your fetters to be taken off, put a pardon in your hands, and brought you forth to the glorious liberty of the children of God, and made you *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*. You had nothing in you to engage him to love you, yet he loved you, when you were most lothsome: What matter of wonder is here! The glorious Bridegroom courted and espoused you to himself on the day in which you might have been led forth to execution! He took off your prison-garment, and cloathed you with robes of righteousness and garments of salvation? He took the chains from off your arms, the rope from about your neck, and put his own comeliness on you, that you might be fit for the king's table! Be not proud of your gifts, graces or attainments: But remember that ye were once *children of wrath, even as others*; all you have is borrowed. Be humble also, and remember your faults this day: Mind, how you have forgotten your Benefactor! How unkindly you have treated Him that remembred you in your low estate! How unsuitably you have walked! Is this your kindness to your friend?

2dly, Pity the children of wrath, and heirs of hell, that still lye in chains of darknes. Be not unconcerned for them, seeing ye were once in the same condition with them; ye have got ashore, but your fellows behind you are still in danger of perishing. Put on bowels of compassion for them, pity them, and use all means for their deliverance.

3dly, Be content with your lot in a present world, and be easy under your present straits and difficulties, whatever they be; for you have the prospect of a great inheritance, from whence you may take encouragement under every trial. You may be easy under the world's hatred, and carry chearfully in midst of all affronts and injuries for you may expect to be envied. Princes favourites are commonly slandered and abus'd. Joseph was hated of his brethren, because his father

shewed more than ordinary kindness to him. "If ye
"were of the world, (saith Christ) the world would
"love his own: But because ye are not of the world,
"but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore
"the world hateth you," John xvi. 19. But let this
solace your minds, ye are heirs of God, and dearly
beloved of him.

4thly, Live as children of God, and heirs of the
kingdom; walk worthy of your dignity, and behave
suitably to your character. You have the angels,
these great officers of the crown, and chief ministers
of state, appointed to wait on you constantly while
here below, and you have a glorious expectation here-
after. Shew forth then the greatness and nobleness
of your spirits, by undervaluing mean and sordid
things. Let your speech and actions here look like the
country to which you are going, that it may be said
of you as of Gideon's children, Judges viii. 18. *Each
one resembled the children of a king.* The heirs of
earthly kings have been observed to have had gene-
rous and noble spirits, and have scorned to intermeddle
with base and inferior matters. It is a common story
of Alexander the Great, That when he was a little
boy, and provoked to run a race with one of his in-
feriors, he first demurred, and then flatly refused the
challenge, saying, *It did not become the son of a king to
submit to so mean an undertaking, and contend with one
so far below him.* The brave spirit of that princely
youth may shame these Christians who are the adop-
ted sons of God, and heirs to a crown that shall never
fade; and yet oftentimes are found groveling on the
earth, like the men of this world, and busied about
things very far below them. Let the heirs of heaven
maintain a holy contempt of the world, and the things
thereof. Let them set their feet on these things on
which worldlings set their hearts; and reckon them-
selves richer and happier in their relation to God and
the kingdom above, than any graceless monarch that

ever wore an earthly crown. Shall earthly men make such a noise in the world, and think none comparable to them, because forsooth their heap of dung is some bigger than their neighbours? (for so Paul esteems the world) and will the children of the King of heaven, *of whom the world is not worthy*, Heb. xi. 38. be so low and mean-spirited, as to be amused and dazzled with the world's vanities: who yet have God for their portion, Christ for their husband, heaven for their home, and glory for their treasure?

5thly, Let the heirs of heaven be mutually concerned in one another; let them sympathize together, when any of them is in trouble, and also rejoice in one another's welfare. And when the time cometh that they arrive at full age, and are taken up to the possession of their inheritance, (though they be your near relations) do not quarrel God's providence, or mourn *as those that have no hope*; or carry, as if you grudged their happiness: but cheerfully submit to your Father's will, and rejoice in their preferment; for the "day of their death is better than the day of their birth."

6thly, Be earnest in prayer, that God may raise up many young heirs to supply the room of those that he is taking home. Let the heirs of God be never so much increased, God's children will not envy their number, but greatly rejoice therein; seeing the inheritance is vast and infinitely satisfying to both men and angels: and our heavenly Father is highly glorified in the multitude of his children. And, *lastly*, When heirs are brought into the family, carry affectionately to them; be kind to young heirs, especially during the time of their non-age and want of experience; be for *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame*, and great shall be your reward in heaven.

In the next place, I shall say something more particularly to those who were at their Father's table yesterday, of whom I presume there have been, and are several sorts.

I. There may be some (I hope) that have ground to say, That they came to their Father's table, and he smiled on them, and dealt bountifully with them. To such I shall say these few things: *1st*, Wonder at the Lord's kindness, and bless his name with your whole souls, for his distinguishing favours to you, who were by nature enemies of God, and children of Satan. *2^{dly}*, Hold fast and improve carefully what you have got, and let not Satan rob you of it. *3^{dly}*, Sympathize with other children of the family, that have not won your length, but perhaps are under great discouragements; mind their ease, and speak a good word for them, while you are favourites of heaven.

II. In the next place, I shall speak to those heirs of heaven, who, notwithstanding of their being at the table, remain full of doubts, and fears, and are very apprehensive that God has not yet put them among the children, nor given them a right to the heir's portion. Well, what is the ground of your doubting? *1*. O, faith one, I scarce feel the working of the sanctifying Spirit of God in my soul, which is the common earnest or pledge of the inheritance, that God useth to give to his heirs while here. *Answer*. Though grace be weak in you, you must *not despise the day of small things*, or say you have none at all: Nay, bless God if thou canst spy any spark of grace in thy heart at all, and pray that God may cherish it. A man that gets an earnest of a good bargain, is not much discouraged whether it be a greater or smaller piece of money, a sixpence, or half a crown, for he thinks the least piece is a sufficient earnest or pledge from an honest man of his bargain; and he is easy, seeing he knows he has to do with one that is faithful, and will not go back of his word: Indeed he might be discouraged, if that which he got were not an earnest-penny: But there is a great difference betwixt a piece of money that is given in gratitude, and that

which is given only in earnest, as a pledge of a far greater sum, or of a very rich bargain. O heir of heaven, remember this, the small degree of grace thou hast, is given only as an earnest of more grace, yea, of eternal glory itself.

2dly, Another may be saying, Ah! but I want that love to God, that a child should have to his father.

Ans. 1st, It is good thou art sensible of it, and that thou knowest thy wants. 2dly, Canst thou say, it is thy greatest grief, thou hast not more love to thy Father; yea, that thou wouldst give a world, if thou wast master of it, for more heart-love to him? Then take comfort, for there is sincerity of love to God in thy heart.

3dly, Another may say, I have not the spirit of prayer, which God useth to bestow on his children; I cannot attain to these enlargements and fluent expressions that I see others have in prayer. *Ans.*

1st, It may be they are old experienced Christians thou conversest with, and they likewise have their ebblings and flowings as well as others; for the *Spirit blows when and where he listeth*. Thou seest perhaps the one, but art unacquainted with the other.

2dly, It is thy happiness, thou hast to do in prayer with one that looks not so much to the words of the mouth, as the affections of the heart. If thou hast a heart centring on God, and flowing out towards him in duty, God loves that better than the most eloquent expressions.

4thly, Ah! saith some poor soul, I cannot attain to any tenderness of heart and frame in prayer. *Ans.*

1st, Is it thy greatest grief and trouble that it is so? Then it is a good sign, thou hast some tenderness in thy heart. 2dly, Dost thou look to thy elder brother Jesus Christ, that he may plead for thee, and send his Spirit to help thy infirmities? Our blessed Lord Jesus has prayed for many that could not pray for themselves. Cry to him for the quickening influence of his Spirit,

to enable you to call on his name; for he gives his Spirit to them that ask him.

5^{thly}, It may be some poor drooping soul is saying, I came to my Father's table, yesterday, but instead of any comfortable discovery, all I got was a frown: my Father frowned, and seemed angry with me. *Ans.* 1st, Thou hast reason to be thankful, that he took any notice of thee at all; for sometimes God holds communion with his people by frowns and reproofs, and thereby humbles them for sin, and draws them nearer to himself. 2^{dly}, Perhaps God is correcting thee for some former sins against light, which as yet thou hast not mourned over: For these whom God takes into his family, and puts among his children, he will correct in his fatherly love; but "his loving-kindness he will not take away from them." Let all the children of God and heirs of heaven submit in a humble and kindly manner, to the reproofs and corrections of their heavenly Father. And let them say, as Elihu, to Job, under his sharp trials, "What I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." Lord train me up during my minority, as thou plearest; make use of what discipline towards me, thou thinkest best for me; only (if it be thy blessed will) make it known to me for my comfort, that I do really belong to thy family, and shall not be shut out of doors for ever. And so my soul shall live and praise thy name." *Amen.*

S E R M O N V.

A SERMON after the COMMUNION.

The fainting Believer strengthened for
his Work.

ISAIAH xl. 29.

*He giveth power to the faint ; and to them that have no
might, he increaseth strength.*

THE Prophet having concluded the preceeding chapter with a prophecy of the captivity of the Jews into Babylon, though it was many years before it came ; he, in this, and the succeeding chapter, furnishes the church and people of God with a great many precious promises for their support and comfort, during that long captivity ; which surely would be of great use to them in that cloudy and dark day.

In the latter end of this chapter, the prophet is reproving the people of God, who are now supposed to be captives at Babylon, for their unbelief and despondency under their affliction, in saying or thinking God had either cast them off, or could not help them, verse 27. For remedying whereof, he puts them in mind of God's power and all-sufficiency to help in the greatest straits, verse 28. And in the text and following verses, he assures them of God's compassion, and readiness to help them under all their sinking discouragements. *He giveth power to the faint, &c.*

More particularly in the text, we may notice these things : 1st, The sad case of many of God's people in captivity, *They were faint and without might, i. e.*

They were under pressures and burdens both outward and inward, that were ready to crush them, and make them faint away; they were called to several pieces both of service and suffering, for which they had no strength nor might of themselves.—*2dly*, We have their mercy and privilege under this sad case, viz. *Power and strength*; i. e. spiritual strength mainly, which is graciously promised them for their encouragement, under all their faintings and trials.—*3dly*, The author of this privilege, *The everlasting God, the Lord Jehovah, with whom is everlasting strength, who fainteth not, neither is weary*.—*4thly*, The way how this mercy is conveyed, it is in a way of free gift, without any worth or merit on our part; he giveth it, and he increaseth it; he giveth strength where it is not, and he increaseth it where it is already given in any measure.

DOCTRINE, “That as the Lord’s people while
“here, are liable to many fainting discouragements,
“under which they cannot support themselves, so the
“Lord is pleased to give them suitable strength for
“all their exigencies.” This is also confirmed from that gracious promise, recorded in the following chapter, Isa. xli. 10. “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” And the Psalmist confirms this truth by his own comfortable experience, Psal. cxxxviii. 3. “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul.”

The method I chuse for prosecuting this doctrine, shall be—

1. To enquire into these fainting discouragements, which believers labour under while here.

2. Why the Lord doth let them meet with such trials.

3. How it is that the Lord doth strengthen his weak and fainting people.

4. What are the great ends and uses for which the Lord gives such strength to his people

5. Give some reasons to prove, that the Lord will certainly give them this strength.

6. Make improvement.

I. As to the first, viz. To instance some of these fainting discouragements that believers labour under while here, and which, in a special manner, do call for divine support. And these are of two sorts, viz. Either of a temporal or spiritual nature.

1st, Sometimes they meet with external afflicting providences, which are very discouraging: As, (1.) When they are trysted with poverty and want, so that they know not how to subsist themselves and their families; this is a great trial, and requires spiritual strength from God to help them to carry right under it. (2.) When they are destitute of earthly friends, and have none to comfort or sympathize with them in trouble; this is also a heavy trial that needs strength from God. (3.) When they are loaded with reproaches and misrepresentations, and that not only from enemies, but even from friends; this hath been very sinking to the best of God's people. (4.) When they are trysted with the death and loss of near and dear relations, pleasant children, and helpful friends; this case hath been afflicting to many. (5.) When they are under bodily sickness or racking pains, so that they "have no rest in their bones, wearisome nights are appointed for them, and they are full of tossings till the dawning of the day" (6.) When they have a near view of meeting with death, that king of terrors, and terror of kings. (7.) When they are under the oppression and persecution of cruel enemies. These are trials that the dearest of God's children are exposed to, and under which they would be ready to faint, if they were not strengthened from

above. And especially these outward pressures are very sinking, and discouraging to them; especially when they think it is their sin that has brought them into these sad circumstances, or when their trials are of a long continuance, and it may be something in them appears to be singular, as it was in the case of the Jews in Babylon. Then it is that God's people are ready to faint and succumb; and should look to God to step in with suitable supplies of strength.

2dly, Sometimes God's people are tryted with fainting discouragements of a spiritual nature: As, (1.) When they find indwelling corruption, and heart plagues strong and prevailing, this case was very affecting and afflicting to David, Psal. lxxv. 3. and to Paul, Rom. vii. 24. and to the church, when they cried out, Isa. lxiv. 6. *Our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.* q. d. The tide is so strong, we have no might to stem it. (2.) When the enemy is exalted over them, and Satan doth harass them with blasphemous injections, horrid atheistical thoughts, and violent temptations: he sometimes tempts God's children to the greatest of sins, as he tempted Job to curse God: How is the soul ready to faint at such a time, if it get not strength from God! and crieth out, "How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" "It is like a sword in my bones, when the enemy reproacheth me, and saith daily to me, where is thy God? O my rock, why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

3dly, When God hides his face, and they cannot get access to him in duty; so as they think, they are given up and left to struggle with Satan and corruption in their own strength. That is a melancholy case to the soul, under which it would faint, without secret support from God.

4thly, When they find their hearts wholly out of frame for any spiritual duty; by reason of much

backwardness to it, wearying of it, and corruption working in them, which carries them away from God in time of duty: Such as atheism, unbelief, worldly-mindedness, heart-hardness, &c. Now the soul would faint, and wholly backslide from God, if he did not secretly uphold it.

5thly, When the soul is brought back again, as it were, to the foot of mount Sinai, and made to hear the thunders thereof, and the curses of a broken law renewed: The law gets a new commission to take the man into custody, and put his feet into the stocks: So that old wounds are opened, and former guilt is revived, and God seems to behave to him like a stranger or an enemy. Thus he did to Heman, Psal. lxxxviii. Now at such a time the soul is ready to faint, and say, *Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* But especially if sickness, or the messengers of death come and knock at the man's door, while in such a case, O! how is he distressed with the melancholy apprehensions of death and judgment? "Death" (thinks he,) is near, and I am most unready for it; "judgment is approaching, my accompts are unclear," and the judge's face all covered with frowns." Now the soul indeed would faint, if God in Christ did not support it.

6thly, As believers have many fainting discouragements, upon the account of their own case, so also upon a public account, in respect of the church and land wherein they live: as, 1st, When they see a spirit of slumber and deep sleep fallen upon professors, so that they are not moved with the judgments of God, when denounced both by his word and providence; yea, though *the fire be kindled, and burning round about them, yet they lay it not to heart.*—
2dly, When they see religion under a great and visible decay among all ranks, many turning daily more care-

less and indifferent about duty, more slack about family-worship, and secret prayer, and daily more carnal and worldly in their conversation. When they see Christian-love decay, divisions and animosities increase, malice, envy, and hatred of one another prevail, and people growing more selfish, minding their own things, and careless about the things of Jesus Christ. 3dly, When they see God's Spirit in a sad measure withdrawn from the assemblies of his people; ordinances become as a sealed book, dry breasts, and a miscarrying womb, so that *Ishabod* may be written on them, or *God is departed*; when they see communions lifeless, and not what they wont to be. Christ is absent, and yet few sensible of the judgment, or laying it to heart, so as to lament after the Lord. They see many busy to sin him away, but few endeavouring to pray him back again. The sincere seekers of God are often like to faint under this discouragement. 4thly, When they see many professors making foul slips, yea, falling into scandalous sins to the reproach of religion, and hardening of the wicked; and but few like to be found sincere in their profession.— 5thly, When they see these that are truly godly, tender and conscientious in their walk; public-spirited and concerned for the interest of Christ, removing and going off the stage: This is a very melancholy and sinking discouragement to the few that are left behind, under which they need support from God: hence it was that the Psalmist cries so earnestly, Psal. xii. 1. *Help Lord, for the godly man ceaseth: for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

II. The second thing proposed was, to enquire why the Lord lets his people be trysted with such fainting discouragements.

1st, To correct them for their former faults and miscarriages: Hence we read, Jer. iv. 18. when the Lord had threatened several sad things against his people, he saith, *thy ways and thy doing have procured*

these things to thee. God will have his people to smart for sin; not to make any satisfaction for sin, but to render sin bitter unto them.

2^{dly}, To humble and make them low, in midst of their great attainments and signal enjoyments: Believers are still apt to be puffed up with these, if they were not kept under by humbling dispensations. Hence even Paul himself had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, *lest he should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations*, 2 Cor. xii. 8.

3^{dly}, To let them know the difference betwixt earth and heaven, a militant and triumphant state. When things go well with us in the world, we are apt to say with Peter on the mount, *It is good for us to be here.* But when these go ill, God's people turn their tongue, and say with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 27. *It is good for me to draw nigh to God.* When we live at ease, we are ready, to think ourselves at home? but when trouble comes, we begin to say, *Arise, let us depart, this is not our rest.* It is not easy to wean us from the comforts of this life; and therefore God many times doth rub gall and wormwood on the breasts of this present world, to imbitter its comforts, and take our hearts off it.

4^{thly}, To awaken the spirit of prayer, and make them more importunate in their addresses to the throne of grace, Psal. cxxx. 1. Christ suffered the storm to continue, till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that the disciples might come and awaken him with their cries to help them, Matth. viii. 25.

5^{thly}, That his people may get new proofs of his love and tender care in strengthening such weak reeds as they are, to endure such storms; and in his stepping in so seasonably for their relief and support, when ready to faint and succumb. God's people have much to speak on this account, to the praise of his free grace, Psal. xciv. 18. "When I said, my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

y more care-

6thly, To cause his people long for heaven, and mend their pace in the way to it, Phil. i. 23. There is a great difference betwixt our prayers in health and in sickness; our repentings in prosperity and adversity, Isa. xxvi. 16. Hos. v. 15. He that in prosperity prayed with a cold heart, and dry eyes, can in affliction cry aloud, and mingle his prayers with tears. Though heaven was much out of sight and out of mind before, and he had scarce a thought of sitting; yet now when distress comes, he begins to sigh with David, Psal. lv. 6. "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest: I would hasten my escape from the windy tempest."

III. The next thing is to enquire, how it is that the Lord doth strengthen his weak and fainting people. And here I shall do two things: (1.) Enquire into the nature of this spiritual strength, the Lord doth give his people. (2.) Into the way and manner how he conveys it to them.

As to the first, This spiritual strength supposeth, that the soul is made alive, and raised out of the grave of sin and a natural state, by the quickning spirit of God. And that the soul is united to Christ by faith, who is the fountain and channel of all grace and spiritual strength.

But more directly, God's strengthening his people imports these things:

1st, The Lord's creating and implanting the habits of grace in the soul, which are the strength of the soul: and therefore called the armour of God, and our shield and helmet, Eph. vi.

2dly, His increasing of grace in the soul; for he not only plants these habits, but strengthens them, and gradually perfects what he has begun, Psal. xcii. 12, 13.

3dly, His breathing on his own work of grace in the soul, and thereby actuating his people's graces, and drawing them forth into a lively exercise: For God must not only plant grace and increase it, but

also set it a-work, and bring it into action, Phil. ii. 13.
 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.'

4thly, The Lord's strengthening of his fainting people, imports his letting out and conveying of fresh supplies of grace to his people, in the time of their need. Not only doth he plant, increase, and actuate grace, but likewise he doth come in with seasonable supplies and reinforcements to the weak and decayed graces of his people, answerable to their pressures and exigencies. Grace of itself is but a creature, and subject to perish, and would soon be destroyed by the frequent attacks made upon it, if it were not seasonably reinforced with new supplies from its author. And thus the Lord, from time to time, feeds the believer's lamp with fresh oil; gives it more faith, more love, more hope, and more desires; and thus he gives power to the faint, and strengthens these things which remain when ready to die.

5thly, It imports the supplying the soul with experiences of the power, mercy, and faithfulness of God, for the nourishing and strengthening of faith in the time of trial: And therefore we find the Lord, when he is strengthening his fainting people in the text and context, he refers them to their former experience, Verse 27, 28. *Hast thou not heard? Hast thou not known?* How then sayest thou that God hath forsaken thee? Often do we find David strengthening his faith this way, Psal. xlii. Psal. cxvi.

6thly, It lies, in the Lord's applying to the soul his gracious and comfortable promises, and thereby animating his people with spiritual courage, and resolution to grapple with all their enemies and difficulties. He shews that God is on their side, that *his grace is sufficient for them, and that he will never leave them, nor forsake them*, Isa. xli. 10. Psal. cxviii. 6. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

7thly, The Lord strengthens his people, by giving them an encouraging view and prospect of a happy

out-gate from all their trials and discouragements, and of a glorious victory over all their enemies, Job xix. 25. Rom. xvi. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

II. I come to the second thing, viz, To shew the way and manner how this spiritual strength is conveyed to believers. And this you may take up in these following propositions

1st, God has treasured up in Jesus Christ his Son, a fulness of grace and spiritual strength for his people. As our Mediator is the purchaser of this strength, so he is the trustee, to whom it is given in order to be bestowed upon believers: This is clear, (1.) From the promises of God for giving strength, they run in this channel Zech. x. 12. "I will strengthen them in the Lord; (i. e. in Christ) and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord." (2.) From the precepts of God, which are in the same strain, Eph. vi. 10. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." 2 Tim. ii. 1. "My son be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ" (3.) From the practice of the saints, they all look for their strength this way, Isa. xlv. 24. "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." And Paul saith, Phil. iv. 13. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" So that Christ is our head of influence and store-keeper. The stock of our grace and strength, since Adam's fall and mismanagement, is all put in Christ's hand; he is the great steward of heaven, the key of the store-house is in his custody, and on him we must daily depend for necessary supplies.

2^{dly}, The way that Christ our head and treasurer, communicates this strength, and gives out the necessary supplies thereof to his people, is by the ministration of the holy Spirit, and his gracious operations, and influences on their souls, John xv. 26 John xvi. 4 15. And for this effect, the Spirit of God dwells in believers,

to excite and draw forth their graces to frequent acts and a lively exercise ; and to give them these gracious aids and assistances, their exigencies do call for.

3dly, The way that the holy Spirit gives this strength to believers is, in the use of appointed means, both public and private. Psal. lxxxiv. 4, 5, 6, 7. Where we see, that these who would go from strength to strength, must dwell in God's house, and attend his ordinances. We expect not our daily food without labouring, tilling, sowing and reaping ; so neither can we look for spiritual strength but in the use of the word, sacraments and prayer.

IV. The fourth thing in the general method is, To shew what are the great ends and uses, for which the Lord gives this spiritual strength to his people.

1st, He gives it to them for doing, or performing of duty ; for without new supplies of strength, we cannot act spiritually, nor persevere in duty : Hence the spouse cries out, Cant. i. 4. " Draw me, and we will run after thee." And the Psalmist saith, Psal cxix 32. " I will run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart " God's work must ever be done in God's strength.

— 2dly, He gives it for suffering, and bearing of crosses and afflictions, and we need God's strength that we may do it without murmuring or fainting, Col. i. 11.

3dly, For fighting, we have strong and dangerous enemies to conflict with, the devil, the world, and indwelling sin ; and we have no strength of our own to resist or subdue them ; wherefore, we must look to God for supernatural strength.

V. The next thing was to give reasons, why the Lord will certainly give suitable strength to his people under all their exigencies.

1st, Because it was purchased for them by their surety Christ, and promised to them in him, Zech. x. 12.

2dly, Because they were in the most solemn and serious manner recommended to the care of God by

his beloved Son Jesus Christ, when he was leaving the world, John xvii. 11.

3^{dly}, Because of their near relation to him, and his great love to them; they are the subjects of his kingdom, the children of his family; yea, they are, as it were, the wife of his bosom; and will he not then take special care of them?

4^{thly}, Because they rely and depend wholly upon the Lord himself for his strength and support, Isa. xxvi. 3. Psal. lvii. 2.

5^{thly}, Because the Lord knows that his people have many strong and dangerous enemies; and that they have no inherent strength to hold out against them, having lost that by the fall. Yea, he knows that they have a natural bentness to backsliding, that the seed of the worst sin is in them, and of themselves they cannot stand before the least spark of a temptation; and so would be infallibly undone, if he did not strengthen them, Hof. xi. 7. Psal. xix. 13.

A P P L I C A T I O N.

Use I. Of Information. We may hence see,

1st, That worldly prosperity and carnal joy are no sign of God's favour: For God's people are subject to many fainting discouragements here. Wicked men receive their good things in this life, but believers good things are to come.

2^{dly}, We may hence be informed of the difference betwixt the two covenants, of works and of grace. Adam, by the first, was to do all by his own inherent strength; but believers, under the second, do all by borrowed strength, and must constantly be beholden to God for new supplies. And it is well for us that it is so; for our stock is far surer in God's hand, than in our own. When the prodigal got his stock in his

own hand, he presently left his father's house, *went into a far country*, and squandered all away, and so would we if God should trust us with it. Besides, by this gracious method believers are kept humble all their days, and put to keep up a constant correspondence with a throne of grace, and give all the glory of their through-bearing to God's free grace. Blessed be God for the well-ordered covenant.

3dly, We may hence see, how great security believers have for their through-bearing: Almighty power is engaged for them; they are strengthened and "kept by the power of God, through faith unto *salvation*." So that everlasting strength must fail before a believer can finally miscarry.

Use II. Of Reproof.

1st, To those who are too secure and confident when they attain to any spiritual comfort or joy, and do not remember the fainting discouragements God's people are subject to, while in this world. O communicants, have you been kindly entertained at this feast? Be not vain or secure, all things here are changeable: How suddenly was David's case altered? Psal. xxx. one time he is mounted up in prosperity; but being too confident, he is presently cast down and troubled. And in Psal. cxix. we find him at one time rejoicing *in God's testimonies, as much as in all riches*; and very soon after, his *soul is cleaving to the dust, and melting for heaviness*. Go not then to build too much on sensible consolations, for these come and go at God's pleasure; it is in heaven only you can have continual day without night or cloudings; but here you are to look for changes, yea, for fainting discouragements, therefore prepare for them by securing a title to divine strength.

2dly, To those believers who give too much way to fainting discouragements, and do not encourage themselves in their covenanted God, and his strength. I do not marvel, O communicants, tho' ye be cast

down, who are sensible of the hidings of God's face, the prevailing of heart-plagues, the buffetings of Satan, &c. but only give not way to excessive discouragement: I call it excessive, when it is ready to make you give over hopes, lay aside endeavours, indispose you for holy duties, refuse to apply to Christ your all-sufficient help, or refuse comfort from God's promises of strength and support. Some indeed think religion lies in desperate unbelieving thoughts, and in making of complaints; but surely there is no religion there, otherwise we must conclude Cain, Judas, and the damned to be godly. Religion rather lies in the actings of faith, and improving God's promises for strengthening us in doing his will.

3dly, To Arminians, who maintain the doctrine of free-will, viz. That it is in the power of a man's free-will, to do that which is spiritually and savingly good, if he please to use his natural abilities. Oh! how little do these men know themselves that talk so: for if it be not in the power of a man's will, when graciously changed and renewed, to do good, without superadded supplies of grace and strength from God, from time to time, as certainly it is not; far less can a natural and unregenerate person do it, that is dead in trespasses and sins.

4thly, To those communicants who look not intirely to God in Christ for strength for the work and warfare, duties and difficulties before them; but lean too much to something in themselves, or something they have got at this occasion,

1. Some trust too much to the stability of their own resolutions and engagements: They have vowed and sworn, and they hope likewise to perform accordingly. But do not depend upon these, otherwise they will soon fail you; as they did Peter after the first Communion. The Psalmist was under many resolutions to keep close to the way of duty, yet he says, Psal.

lxxiii. 2. "My feet were almost gone, and my steps
"had well nigh slipt." And he acknowledges, it was
nothing but God's mercy that held him up, Pf. xciv. 18.

2. Others trust too much to the stability of their
gracious habits, without looking to God for daily re-
newed influences of strength, for actuating and recruit-
ing their weak graces. But, what is grace, faith, love,
fear of God, repentance, hope? Of themselves they
are but vanishing things, and if they were not season-
ably strengthened and supplied from heaven, they
would soon die, Rev. iii. 2.

5thly, We may here reprove those who make it an
excuse for the neglect of duty, They want strength.
Oh! it is, because they want will. For can you say,
That though you have no strength, of yourselves, yet
you desire to cast your impotent souls in God's way,
and aim at duty as ye can, looking to God for strength,
and pleading his promise? Could you say this, it were
something. Were you like a man rowing up the
water, and still beat back by the impetuous stream,
you might have some shadow of excuse; but when
you do not make sincere attempts, you can have none.

Quest. How shall we undertake to perform duty,
when we are dead, and find the influences of grace
and strength withdrawn?

Ans. 1st. Whatever be our case or frame for
duty, yet still God's command is of binding force on
us, and obliges us to do it.

2dly, No pretence of indisposition can warrant our
not obeying a divine command: for our deadness and
indisposition is our sin, and one sin can never excuse
another, two blacks cannot make one white. So that
in a dead hour, you must essay to do your duty, tho'
you can do nothing but the very outward form.

3dly, You must aim at your duty to prevent greater
evils, for if you neglect it wholly, your case grows
still worse: Your deadness increases, your hardness,

impenitency, darkness, weakness and indisposition will still grow greater.

4thly, By aiming at duty, you put yourselves in God's road: And when, like the blind man, you lye in Christ's way, you stand fairer for a visit or an alms from him, than these who stay at a distance.

5thly, Duties performed, when we are indisposed, may be very pleasing to God. It must surely be acceptable to our gracious Lord and master, to see one of his weak or lamed servants attempt to go his errands, tho' he halt and make but slow progress in his way: Nay, this will move his tender heart to pity him, and give him strength. And many a time have his servants got supplies of strength on a sudden, when they have been essaying duty. Their souls, *ere they were aware, have made them like the chariots of Amminadib*, Cant. vi. 12. Therefore, O discouraged communicant, persist in aiming at thy duty, whatever be thy present frame. Who knows, when thou art lifting at thy heavy burden, but God will graciously lend thee a lift, and lift it for thee.

Use III. Of Trial. O communicants, examine if you have got any spiritual strength at this solemn feast. Many a weak believer has found it a strengthening meal to their fainting souls. Mark, if it be so with you. *1st*, Do ye find your graces more quick and vigorous than formerly. As for instance, 1. Is faith more lively? Are you better pleased with the contrivance of grace, and method of salvation, than before? And are you now enabled to abandon your own righteousness, and go out to your surety Christ; laying the burden of your sins upon him, and leaning wholly to him for pardon and acceptance with God: And also looking to him as your head of influences for heart-purity and sanctifying grace. And strength to perform duty? 2. Is your repentance and grief for sin increased? Do you see more of sin's deformity, and abhor it as the enemy of Christ? And are you more

afraid of piercing your Redeemer by it, and more resolved against wicked company and temptations to sin than before? 3. Is your love and desire toward Christ more quickened: Are you more restless without his presence? Would you part with your best enjoyments in a world, for a sight of his face? Are you more desirous of heart-holiness, that you may be capable to serve Christ, and advance the interest of his kingdom?

2dly, If this ordinance hath been a strengthening meal to you, then you will find more delight in duty than before, you will be inclined and enabled to pray more fervently, to hear more attentively, to praise more affectionately, receive more believingly, keep the sabbath more exactly, watch over your heart and ways more diligently: and, in a word, to be more humble and pious towards God, more just and righteous towards man, and more sober and temperate towards yourselves; yea, you will be more afraid to shift or neglect any known duty than you were before.

3dly, You will be more animated and encouraged to fight the good fight of faith, to resist the devil's temptations, and the world's allurements, to struggle against your lusts, and mortify indwelling sin. And you will be setting conscience on the watch-tower, to give warning of the enemies approach; and you will not be slow to take the alarm,

4thly, If you have got more strength, you will be better reconciled to the cross than formerly: and content with patience and submission to underly what troubles and afflictions the Lord thinks fit to tryst you with for your soul's good; yea, and kiss the rod when it comes, saying, *Good is the will of the Lord concerning me.*

Use IV. Of Exhortation. Let me hence exhort you to several duties.

1st, Let these believers, who are not trysted with such fainting discouragements as others, bless God for his tenderness towards them, and bear their smaller

trials the more patiently. How gentle is your exercise, and soul-trouble, in respect of Job's, David's, Heman's, and many others, dear and near to God, who have been ready to faint under their burdens, and pressed above measure; God is gracious to you, he sees you are weak, and will not overburden you.

2dly, Let none misconstrue believers exercises of spirit, nor despise them, because they are frequently faint and discouraged: For the greatest spirits in the world have been thus exercised. David was a man of singular valour, that had a heart as *the heart of a lion*, 2 Sam. xvii. 10. A man of eminent wisdom, and therefore said to be *wise as an angel of God*, 2 Sam. xiv. 20. A man of a cheerful temper, and a great master of music, and therefore called *the sweet singer of Israel*, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. And yet we frequently find him sore troubled, bowed down, cleaving to the dust, and sharply exercised under the hidings of God's face, and other soul-distresses.

3dly, Doth God give suitable strength to his people in all exigencies? Let none abuse this doctrine, by giving up with the use of the means that God has appointed; and neglecting to use their own endeavours. For tho' believers have Christ to lean to all their way in their journey to heaven; yet none must expect to be carried thither upon his shoulders, without setting down a foot. We may warrantably look to him for strength for every duty; yet it is in our using the means that this strength is conveyed.

4thly, Beware of leaning to yourselves, and neglecting to look for this promised strength. (1.) Lean not to your own purposes; for your *goodness is like the morning dew*. (2.) Lean not to your gracious habits; for these are but creatures, and ready to die. (3.) Lean not to your duties and performances; for they are defiled and unclean. (4.) Lean not to your frames; for they are fleeting and unconstant. And besides, it is highly dangerous and provoking to God,

for to trust in any of these; remember the fearful curse that is pronounced against him *that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord*, Jer. xvii. 5, 6. Whom then shall we trust? read Isa. xxvi. 4. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever: For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

5thly, Let all believing communicants bless God for this new and excellent method of salvation through Jesus Christ. The new covenant is far better than the old. Now our stock is not in our own hand, but in Christ's, and he manages it for us, which is our great happiness. As when God brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand, he did not let them down on the other side of the Red Sea, and then bid them shift their way to Canaan: no, he led them on their way: *Yea, As a man carries his children, so he bare them all the way they went.* So when God, in a day of his power, brings an elect soul out of spiritual Egypt, he doth not let him in the way with a stock of strength in his hand, and then leave him to march through the wilderness alone: no, he leads and supports him all the way; for he knows that the whole country rises on him in his march, and if left to go alone without special and renewed aid, he would never get to Canaan.

Quest. But what course shall I take to get these seasonable supplies of strength from God, that I may be helped safe through the wilderness, without fainting and upfitting?

Answ. Take these Directions.

1st, Labour to be thoroughly convinced of your own impotence and insufficiency, that you may be weak in your own sense and feeling; for the way to be strong, is to be weak, according to the apostle's experience, 2 Cor. xii. 10. *When I am weak, then am I strong.* Hence also it is said of these worthies, Heb. xi. 34. *Out of weakness they were made strong,* i. e. out of weakness felt and apprehended.

2dly, Humbly represent and bemoan your impotence before God, like Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18. *I heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.* He felt his own impotence and aversion to what was good; and then he groans and looks up to God for power; *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.* And, in the next verse, we see how readily the Lord stepped in with pity and help to him. Thus also did Jehosaphat, and found help, 2 Chron. xx. 12. "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee." q. d. Tho' we be weak, yet we know thou art infinitely powerful, and full of compassion.

3dly, Use well any small power you have, and it will increase. The right arm is more strong and vigorous than the left, because it is more exercised: So grace, the more it is exercised, the more it grows, Matth. xiii. 12. Prov. x. 29.

4thly, Wait on the Lord in the diligent use of the means; for it is promised, Isa. xl. 31. *They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength.* And in Psal. xxvii. 14. *Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.* We must use, but not trust to the means, but to God in the due use of them.

5thly, Walk tenderly, and guard against every known sin; for sin lets out the soul's strength, as bleeding lets the spirit out of the body.

6thly, Be often looking, in a believing way, to the Mediator Christ, your Treasurer and Head of influences, and derive all your supplies of strength from and thro' him alone.

7thly, Carefully entertain the Spirit's motions, and fall in with them, *Grieve not the Spirit of Christ*, which is sent to strengthen you; otherwise you will cast away your strength from you.

Lastly, Acquaint yourselves, O communicants, with the word of God, and its gracious promises of strength; lay them up in store against the time of need, and plead them humbly with God: For a prayer grounded on a promise is likely to prevail. This was David's argument under his faintings, Psal. cxix. 28. Strengthen thou me according to thy word. And he had the experience of its prevailing with God, Psal. cxxxviii. 3. In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. I shall add no more, but conclude with the apostle's words, 1 Pet. v. 10, 11. The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

F I N I S.

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